

**In Proximity**  
**Episode 11: Ryan Coogler and Blitz Bazawule**  
**Final Transcript**

[Music/Old Radio Sounds by Ken Nana]

[VOICEOVER]

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

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

**Blitz Bazawule:** When I make a film, you know, I look forward to going off and writing a book, or I look forward to going off on tour as a musician. And when I come back, and I make another film, I'm just filled up now. You know what I mean? And I have something else to say, you know, in that department, anyway. So, you know, I've always encouraged anybody who's multifaceted as a creative, man, to just go out and do all these other things because they keep the well constantly flowing.

[In Proximity Theme Music by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

**Paola Mardo:** You're listening to In Proximity.

Blitz Bazawule is a filmmaker, musician, visual artist, and author. Born in Ghana and based in New York, Blitz's feature directorial debut, *The Burial Of Kojo*, was acquired by Array Releasing, the distribution arm of Ava DuVernay's production company Array. It was released on Netflix in 2019. After that, Blitz co-directed Beyoncé's *Black Is King*, which earned him a Grammy nomination in 2020.

Blitz is the director of the upcoming *The Color Purple Musical* for Warner Bros. produced by Oprah Winfrey, Steven Spielberg, Quincy Jones, and Scott Sanders. As a musical artist, his albums include *Diasporadical*, *Afropolitan Dreams*, *Native Sun*, and *Stereotype*. His first novel, *The Scent of Burnt Flowers*, was published in 2022 and is being developed into a television series by FX with Blitz producing. Blitz is also the founder of Africa Film Society and the recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship, TED Fellowship, and the Vilcek Prize.

Blitz met our founder Ryan Coogler at a TED conference before Blitz shot his first film and before Ryan made *Black Panther*. They talk about their first meeting, multi-hyphenate artistry and the importance of creative rotation, and working as filmmakers who tell stories across the Black diaspora.

[MUSIC STOPS]

**Ryan Coogler:** I'm Ryan Coogler. I'm one of the founders of Proximity Media. I'm also a writer, director, producer. And I'm here talking with my good friend, Blitz. I met him as Blitz the Ambassador, but I—I'll let him introduce himself.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yeah. My name is Blitz Bazawule. I'm a filmmaker. I'm a writer. I'm a musician. I'm a visual artist. I'm originally from Ghana. I'm the founder of Inward Gaze, a creative company, and it's a pleasure to be here.

**Ryan Coogler:** That's amazing, man. So, listen, we just was going back and forth about, you know, where we actually met. And what's crazy is with technology and how we traveled, we can go back to, like, the exact dates. We were talking about how it was February 2016, and we were at the TED conference in Vancouver of all places,

**Blitz Bazawule:** Of all places.

**Ryan Coogler:** How'd you wind up getting there, bro?

**Blitz Bazawule:** So I became a TED Fellow in 2016. So I was a—I was a—it was my first year as one of the TED Fellows, and I also had the great privilege of performing on the main stage with my band. So that was my first time at the Ted con. It was overwhelming, man. It was so much going on. It was so many people, but, you know—that was—it was also not as diverse a space back then, you know what I mean?

And I remember seeing you way across the room. I was like, "Oh, that's another Black guy. I definitely got to go talk to him," you know what I mean? And I came up, and that's when I recognized, I was like, "Oh, man, that's Ryan. I mean, I had already seen Fruitvale, of course. And I'd seen, of course, Creed. So, yeah, I mean, I feel like that was how we met.

But I will never forget this, though, when you were like, "Yo, walk with me." And we walked over to the TED bookstore. And you were like, "Yo, I'll get you this book. It's going to change your life. And that was Steal Like an Artist by Austin Kleon.

**Ryan Coogler:** Oh, man.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yes. And legit, it is the book I gifted—I've gifted that book to more people than I can count.

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

**Blitz Bazawule:** And the principles of that book, bro, is how I get here, without a question.

**Ryan Coogler:** Wow.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Without a question. We'll go in-depth later, but I just—you know, thank you for that because that meant a lot.

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah, that's crazy, bro. I didn't even remember that, bro.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Ryan Coogler:** I was sitting listening on the edge of my seat, like, man, what did I do?

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, man. No, man. It's a brilliant book. And I'll tell you the beauty about that book, though, is that it talked about how, as an artist—because, you know, I

come from hip-hop—and biting is a cardinal sin, you know? But biting is biting one person's style, right?

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah.

**Blitz Bazawule:** What the book taught me and taught us, you know, was that your job is to figure out how to siphon from several people, and that's how you create something special, right? And that was truly a revelation for me, you know what I mean?

**Ryan Coogler:** Oh, that's amazing, man. I'm glad I was a positive influence, you know what I'm saying?

[LAUGHTER]

**Blitz Bazawule:** Oh, for sure. For sure, man.

**Ryan Coogler:** I remember, man, I met you at a time when I needed you, bro. It was crazy about it because it was 2016. I had just gotten that—the job to co write and direct Black Panther, the first one.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yes, sir.

**Ryan Coogler:** And I was just coming off of Creed. And it was maybe my third TED conference I had been to. But I had always found it to be a place—I was thankful to be invited. But it was challenging, like, in terms of finding people who looked like us back then, you know, and—

**Blitz Bazawule:** Indeed.

**Ryan Coogler:** But, you know, something in my gut told me that I should go that year because I was making a film that was going to be so, like, science-fiction-forward. And we were wrapping our heads around it still, my co writer Joe Robert Cole and I, but I felt like it'd be important to go. And I also knew, that year, that I was going to try to get to the Continent for the first time. And I remember when we met, and we were talking about a lot of things, but really I was kind of asking you, you know, where you from. And it turned out we knew a few people in common like Bradford Young and Terence Nance, a few other folks in the music business. And I think on your—on your badge, it might've said, like, "artist," or what have you, but, you know, you were very music-forward at the time.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Very.

**Ryan Coogler:** And then, as we started talking more, you know, you started talking about that you were a filmmaker, too.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Of course.

**Ryan Coogler:** And I—I got really excited. But, yeah, like, I—I mean, I remember, shortly after that, I hit you up about traveling to the Continent, to see if you had anybody in the places that I was looking to go because you Blitz the Ambassador, of course you did, you know what I'm saying? You got somebody in every country.

**Blitz Bazawule:** I do. I do, I do.

**Ryan Coogler:** But no, it—it was amazing, man. Like, I'm glad I could recommend anything for you, man, because the way you looked after me a few months later when it was time for me to make that first voyage home, it was just, like, the advice that you gave me and the folks that you connected me with, man, it was just incredible, you know?

**Blitz Bazawule:** No, that's beautiful, man, and shout out to my girl Vuyi.

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yeah, man. It was—

**Ryan Coogler:** Big shout-out to Vuyi.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yeah, man. It was—and that's the beauty, right, of, like, diaspora work, when you've moved around enough to know enough people across the world. And that work, for me, has always been, like, the center. Everything we do kind of comes out of that, creatively, but connecting people, connecting ideas, and vice versa, bro. Like, you know, going back to Ghana because, you know, you talk about this very critical point for you.

For me, it was equally critical because I was transitioning from, like you said, music heavy—that's pretty much what I had done for 10 years prior. But the challenge was that, you know, I knew that the industry was plateauing in a way that I just would never be able to keep up, you know? So I immediately was like, all right—you know, my mom always used to say, "Use all your gifts," you know? And I started as a visual artist, you know, as a kid. You know, I drew a lot, and that always told me that I had—I had some visual qualities about how I saw things. And so I took full advantage of that meeting because, you know, the other thing is you were, like, the first director who ever, like, talked to me, you know what I mean?

**Ryan Coogler:** Oh, man.

**Blitz Bazawule:** That's another thing. Like, you know, when you're making these transitions in life, you know, you never really know. Like, you know, you kind of show up with hopes, but, like, you were the first person that was like, "Yo, this is what I do," and of course, I had followed your work. And so I knew enough about what—the spirit of the work you did, right?

So, anyway, going back to Ghana to make *Burial of Kojo*, man, that was like—I took all that you had kind of taught me in that brief moment of meeting, right, and made the movie. But the beauty of it was coming back, right, and sitting with you and Zinzi and getting incredible notes, right, for that film. And in all honesty, bro, like, that was the beginning for me. And, like, this whole journey does not begin without that meeting at TED, coming back from Ghana with the film, and then kind of figuring out where to go from there.

**Ryan Coogler:** Man, that's incredible, man. Like, I mean, I remember you—us staying in touch, and you talking about—I mean, we would just stay active on WhatsApp.

**Blitz Bazawule:** That was it.

**Ryan Coogler:** Because I remember you went to Senegal.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yes.

**Ryan Coogler:** And it seemed like it was your first time, maybe, in Dakar.

**Blitz Bazawule:** It was my first time, yeah.

**Ryan Coogler:** And it was a arts festival, I believe. And you were sending me pictures, you know, images, you know, from the Continent. This was before I had a chance to go. You were saying, "Man, look at what these artists are up to. I just met this guy who's doing this. I just met this person who's doing that." And then Ludwig, our composer, Ludwig Göransson, and one of our partners at Proximity, he ended up going to Senegal with his wife, like, like, shortly after that.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Wow.

**Ryan Coogler:** To touch down and, you know, fellowship with Baaba Maal and get in touch with all the musicians out there.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Of course.

**Ryan Coogler:** And I remember you—you—it was a retina exhibit that was there, and you sent that imagery, and that was a big inspiration for me and Hannah Beachler, our production designer, on Black Panther set. But it was—it was, like, a constant exchange. We were just exchanging music.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Constant.

**Ryan Coogler:** And I remember when you were going to make that movie, setting up your film offices, man, I remember the pictures that you was sending. And, like, you were saying, "Yeah, I'm going to this village that's on the water. I'm doing X, Y, and Z. Here's our offices." You know what I'm—and it was—it was crazy inspiring, you know, to watch the grind and then watch you achieve it. So when you came back with the movie, and you had hit me and Zinzi up—Zinzi Coogler, who's my wife and also a founding partner at Proximity Media—you hit us up and was like, "Hey, man, I got the movie. I'd love for y'all to take a look, you know, get some feedback." And I—I was just fired up to see it. I remember we watched on the projector in our condo.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

**Ryan Coogler:** And I think we went and got some food, like across the street.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yep. We went and got some food. You guys broke down the notes for me. And, yo, it is—it is—and I have to say, I mean, remember the movie started completely different.

**Ryan Coogler:** It did.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Like, that, for me, is the thing I always reference, you know? And you were like, "Nah, Blitz. This movie starts 5 minutes later, or 10 minutes later," you know what I mean? And at the time, of course, I'm over there going, "Wait, wait, wait, but you don't understand," you know? Like, this is—no, but then—that's the beauty of these notes, right? It's just like, in your sober moment, right, in your quiet moment, you can sit down, and you can process them, and you can go, "Yeah, man, he's right. He's right. It's starting—that's—that's the wrong place to start," right? And that—I'll tell you, the beauty of that was that then Ava DuVernay—

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah.

**Blitz Bazawule:** You know, Ava, who runs Array and a prolific filmmaker herself—

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah, my big sister, our big sister.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Our big sister, right? Saw the movie and was like, "Listen, Blitz, I'll give you a path. You know, I'll give you a path." And that—I'm so grateful for that opportunity because, you know, distribution is the other wing of what we do. It's one thing to make a beautiful film. It's one thing to make a heartfelt film. The challenge is: how is this movie communicated, right? And Ava embraced me as a young brother and really brought me up, showed me the ropes, as well, right?

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah.

**Blitz Bazawule:** You know, from my first press conversations, you know, we had a New York Times review, I mean, things that I had never dreamt of, right?

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah.

**Blitz Bazawule:** And then Beyoncé sees that, right, which becomes like—I go—you know, it's, like, sometimes when you're beginning a journey, you really can't tell, you know, where it all goes. You know?

**Ryan Coogler:** Right, right.

**Blitz Bazawule:** You just know that I have to do the absolute best I can at this moment, right? But you don't know what comes out of it. And for—you know, for Ava—you know? For Ava to put it up and for Beyoncé to see it and be so moved that she was like, "We're making Black Is King, and I want you to come be involved with this with us and help guide it," bro, that was like, oh, it's Beyoncé, bro. Like, come on. This is—this is the greatest—

**Ryan Coogler:** And the—and the music, that you started with music.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Music. The music, bro, and I'll—you know, it's just—it was such a—talk about a whirlwind. And we're only talking—well, we met in '16. You know, I went back, made the movie, '17, '18 I was back, right?

**Ryan Coogler:** It was fast.

**Blitz Bazawule:** To watch it with y'all. And '19 was when all of this happened. The movie came out on Netflix, '19. I worked on Black Is King in '19. And then '20, the pandemic hits, and we're not done with Black Is King, all right? So now you're going, "Was this all"—

**Ryan Coogler:** "Is it all going to go away? Is my momentum gone?" Yeah.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Is it all going to go away? But then the crazy thing is, while that window of uncertainty is happening, the film drops on Disney+, and the same time, same window, I get a call, "Hey, Warner Bros. is looking to do Color Purple. Are you interested?" Nothing has happened this quickly in my life, you know what I mean? Like, everything I've done has taken,

you know, 5, 10 years, you know? This was insane because, bro, literally, I got this job in less than two weeks.

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah. I remember when you got it, bro. I remember when you got it.

**Blitz Bazawule:** It was—it was—you were the—you know what's crazy? First person I called.

**Ryan Coogler:** Oh, man.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Bro, legit.

**Ryan Coogler:** So I'll tell you this, Blitz. I was hearing about it from the other side because, at Proximity, our first two film projects were at Warner Bros. And we were working with Niija on Judas and the Black Messiah with Shaka.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Shout out to Niija.

**Ryan Coogler:** Niija Kuykendall.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Incredible exec, yes.

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah, she's at Netflix now, but she was at Warner Bros. then and had been at Warner Bros. for, like, I feel like over a decade at that time.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yes.

**Ryan Coogler:** Was really poised with major things and was already doing major things at that time.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Indeed. Indeed.

**Ryan Coogler:** And, you know, we would talk about our other projects. you know, and, you know, Color Purple was like her baby.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yes. Yes.

**Ryan Coogler:** And she was like, "Yeah, we bringing in Blitz." And I was like, "Oh, man."

[LAUGHTER]

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yes. Yes.

**Ryan Coogler:** You know, and I didn't want to advocate too hard, you know what I'm saying?

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yes.

**Ryan Coogler:** Because, you know, but I was keeping posted, man.

**Blitz Bazawule:** That's a blessing, bro.

**Ryan Coogler:** Me and Zinz was praying for you, bro.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Oh, give thanks, guys, because it truly was a—it was a whirlwind. Let's put it that way. You know, and every time I'd get off one of these Zooms, you know, whether it was Oprah Winfrey, with Steven Spielberg, with—like, I'll just walk the block, bro, because I literally could not believe, you know? I was home. My son was home with me and, you know, because everyone was doing school at home.

**Ryan Coogler:** Right. Yeah.

**Blitz Bazawule:** So, you know, I would just be like, "Yo, kid, I'll be right back." You know, I'd just walk the block because I just could not believe the blessing. You know, you pray for things, right? And you work hard for things. And, you know, I'm also—you know, I come from a place where, you know, no one's done this, you know what I mean? And, and this is something that we talk about a lot, you know? It's just we're first in these really incredible, you know—a place—and, of course, we stand on shoulders of people who have—who have built this, but in terms of where—the glass ceiling that we're cracking, you know, we're one of the first to do it.

[KN 9 to 5 by Ludwig Göransson]

**Ryan Coogler:** So, Blitz, man, just take me back, man. Like, take me back to Ghana. You know, from how you were explaining it to me, your people are from the north, I believe you shared, with Ghana.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yep, yep. The absolute north. We're from, you know, the Upper West region. My grandmother, you know, who ended up being the matriarch of our family, and in all honesty is where I get a lot, a lot of my creativity without a doubt and basic entrepreneurial spirit, you know—you know, she did some of everything, you know? But—but she was a phenomenal storyteller. And, you know, I always say, like, she was like the HBO, Netflix of the day before any of that existed, you know, because she could tell stories that would—

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

**Blitz Bazawule:** You know, that—that were visually—visually, you could see them. And we—you know, the beautiful thing about my family, even though we grew up in Accra, which is the most southern, we always went to visit, you know what I mean? Which is also where I learned—

**Ryan Coogler:** So y'all traversing the state to go back to—

**Blitz Bazawule:** Constantly, to the village, you know? And every vacation, you know, my parents would go, you know, just have us stay with her and the rest of my extended family there. And we farmed. We did a lot of things, you know? And the beautiful thing I learned there was this idea of crop rotation, which I've kind of now evolved into creative rotation, right?

**Ryan Coogler:** Crop rotation, man, talk to us about that.

**Blitz Bazawule:** So crop rotation, pretty much, is when—when they plant certain plants, right, they use up all the nutrients.

**Ryan Coogler:** In the soil.



**Blitz Bazawule:** In the soil, exactly.

**Ryan Coogler:** Okay.

**Blitz Bazawule:** So—so you have to plant something that will, you know, replenish that soil, right? And, you know, a lot of leguminous, like, crops do that. You know, they give the earth nitrogen and such. Anyway, but that's a thing that I—you know, my grandma would explain to us, you know, just, like, how—

**Ryan Coogler:** Come on, man.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Why it's—why it's important to keep it rotational, right? And—and, you know, as I grew up as an artist, the beautiful thing that I've been able to hold onto to, that piece of knowledge, is constantly figuring out how to evolve creatively and never allowing—because, you know, when you're fixated on one creative endeavor, what happens is that inevitably, it starts to weigh. And the soil, which is you, starts to kind of wane, right?

**Ryan Coogler:** Blitz, I got—I got full-body chills right now, sir. Yo.

[LAUGHTER]

**Blitz Bazawule:** But that's that OG knowledge, though, you know?

**Ryan Coogler:** Keep going, bro, because you blowing my mind.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Bro, and—and that—the beautiful thing is, you know, a lot of people go, "Yo, Blitz, you do this, you do this, you do that. How do you do it all?" You know, and that legitimately directly relates to my time on the farms with my grandmother, understanding how it's critical for change, you know what I mean? And what happens that when you come back, and you plant that thing, it absorbs so much more now because you've replenished the nutrients, right, in the soil.

And so, like, when I make a film, you know, I look forward to going off and writing a book, or I look forward to going off on tour as a musician. And when I come back, and I make another film, I'm just filled up now. You know what I mean? And I have something else to say, you know, in that department, anyway. So, you know, I've always encouraged anybody who's multifaceted as a creative, man, to just go out and do all these other things because they keep the well constantly flowing.

[Good Times by Ludwig Göransson]

**Blitz Bazawule:** I grew up in Ghana in late '80s, early '90s, and Ghana, at the time, was going through quite a bit of a transition, right? We had existed in kind of more of, like, a dictatorship for a little bit, and it was transitioning to a more democratic country, which now has become one of the most stable countries on the Continent. But that period was kind of like transitional, and the music and works that were coming out of that time were quite—you know, they weren't as politically or socially because of the level of stifling, right, of information, right?

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah.

**Blitz Bazawule:** But what happened was that hip-hop dropped sometime in the late '90s, right? I'm sorry, early '90s. And one of the biggest transitions was when Public Enemy came to Ghana in 1992.

**Ryan Coogler:** Come on, man.

**Blitz Bazawule:** At the height, bro. At the height of Fight the Power, bro. And it was—I remember—

**Ryan Coogler:** Oh, man.

**Blitz Bazawule:** I remember the transitions. I remember just the—

**Ryan Coogler:** But, Blitz, bro, what's crazy about that is—is I believe Fight the Power was done for Do the Right Thing, right?

**Blitz Bazawule:** It was done for Do the Right Thing, exactly.

**Ryan Coogler:** So that's hip-hop, film—

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yes, everything.

**Ryan Coogler:** Together.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Landing, landing in Ghana at that time, right, and we could—

**Ryan Coogler:** Come on, man.

**Blitz Bazawule:** And, again, we just—we could not believe the sheer energy and force of this culture, you know? And it—for us, we became beneficiaries, right, of our brothers and sisters far away, far removed, right, dealing with—because you also got to remember, early '90s, Rodney King, all these other things happening. And the information about Blackness in America is completely opposite of what the music is telling us, right, you know, at the time.

And so that transition, for me, and that was kind of formative years for me, right, was just understanding that, wow, man, like, okay, if I, too, was able to hone this power of words, right, I, too, could communicate far across shores, right? That became—that became my obsession, you know? And so, you know—and thank God, back then, hip-hop was also Continent-facing. I mean, you're talking Native Tongues, you're talking De La.

**Ryan Coogler:** I mean, there's a argument—like, there's a argument that could be made or a belief system that people have that all Black art, Black being African American art, those of us that was transported here by captors and those of us that came from various diasporas, you know what I'm saying, that all the music made is a call home.

**Blitz Bazawule:** 100 percent.

**Ryan Coogler:** And we still here.

**Blitz Bazawule:** 100 percent.

**Ryan Coogler:** Y'all here. Are y'all there?

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yes. Yes.

**Ryan Coogler:** You know what I mean? Like, it's—it's mind-blowing to me, you know, that that would be an inflection point for you when Public Enemy comes to Ghana, you know what I'm saying?

**Blitz Bazawule:** It's insane, bro. And the beautiful thing is, you know, my understanding of art became so much more expansive, you know, because now PE is not only telling me about music. It's telling me about books to read. So, like, I'm—I'm finding Carter G. Woodson. I'm finding—you know, and through all of this stuff, right, through all this stuff, I have the blessing and privilege to now travel to the United States as a student, you know?

And I went to Kent State University, which was, you know—on surface was, you know, was probably one of the most—the whitest institutions you could probably ever go to, but it had one of the most incredible Pan African Studies departments in the country. And I was very lucky to land with some incredible professors that would kind of like feed me, you know, some more of what I did not know, right?

And in a way, I came to understand the complexities of the Continent more as a college student in Ohio, of all places, right, because of course, now, you're at the intersection of all of this information, of writers, of philosophers, of idea people who have been able to put together why the things are the way they are, right? But now I can also look at it from a multidimension, like multiple prisms of, oh, wait, it ain't just Africa, bro. It's—it's the U.S. It's the Caribbean. It's Latin America. It's—

**Ryan Coogler:** That—that's what it turned on for me, too, bro, like in college, man. I was at Sacramento State, but it was some folks there from the Continent that I'd be in business school with. And I remember there was a guy from Sudan who I was talking to. We were hearing a lot about Darfur.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Of course. Of course, wow.

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah, and shouts out to Ammar Mohamed who works at—supports me as my assistant at Proximity. He's Sudanese.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Amazing.

**Ryan Coogler:** Out of Flint, Michigan, you know.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Wow.

**Ryan Coogler:** But I remember my boy, Amir, man. I say, like, "Bro, talk to me about"—and I was—he was the first, man. He turned around in the middle of business class and said, "Have you heard of the Scramble for Africa?"

[LAUGHTER]

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yo, yo. Wow.

**Ryan Coogler:** I'm like, "Nah, bro." I'm like, "Nah, I ain't heard of that." You know, he's like—and he—man, he was such a interesting dude, man, because he had—he had cerebral palsy, and he kind of talked like this. He's like, "Coog, have you heard about the Scramble for Africa?" You know, I'm like—I'm like, "Nah." So he just—he put me on and right then and there. We was, like, in accounting class or something, you know what I'm saying? But it's just—it's just interesting that it would happen for you there because that's how it happened for me, bro, you know what I'm saying?

**Blitz Bazawule:** It's incredible, man. And, again, I look back at the journey that—you know, you don't know what the path is, right? What I have 100 percent understood, even back when I was in Ghana as a kid, was that something was always odd to me around the fact that you got 1.2 billion Africans and then the diaspora, you know, let's add another 500 million across the board, right?

**Ryan Coogler:** Yes, sir. Easy.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Easy, right? You know, and, look, if we do the math, we're trending somewhere around one-third of the human population, right, on Earth, right? And my concern even when I was young, and I couldn't probably articulate it like this when I was younger, but I always knew something was odd around the fact that this many people—again, we're not talking about a very tiny popu—we're talking about a significant chunk of this planet has so little influence and space in everything. We're talking arts, politics. I mean, I never understood why we do so much around the world, and no one knew anything about us, you know, and vice versa. I never understood how, you know, the UN General Council was structured the way they were and who had permanent seats and who didn't. I mean, there are all these things that just never made—even the World Cup used to blow my mind, right? You know, I'm a big football/soccer fan, right, and, like, I never understood why there were so many European teams in the World Cup and so few Africans—again, I was just talking straight numerics. I didn't know—I didn't understand prejudice fully at that time, but—

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah, you looking at—you looking at it like a math problem. Yeah.

**Blitz Bazawule:** That's it. And—and as the kids say, the math was not math-ing, you know what I mean?

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah, the math wasn't adding up.

**Blitz Bazawule:** So—so, anyway, all of that has just really led me to this deep curiosity around why and also assert ourselves in all spaces to make sure that we are represented in these spaces, right? And that has kind of become a—a mission for me, creatively certainly, but personally, as well, is just to make sure that we are at the table because when you are at the table, then you can say, "Nah, that ain't the way it's supposed to be," you know what I mean?

**Ryan Coogler:** Yes, sir.

**Blitz Bazawule:** But—but when you're not there, you know, these decisions are—are being made for you. Anyway, so—so all that to say that was kind of my journey early to arrive at, you know, where I met you, which was, you know, I had come to the States, I had traveled. I'd gone out with my band, learned a lot around the world, connected with lots of people, and then I found myself at a place where I realized that I needed to expand this creative voice of mine, right? And I needed to implement more this idea of, of creative rotation, right, and allow myself

to also not be so emotionally invested, you know what I mean, in any one thing. So, like, I never stopped, you know? Like, I never—I'm not checking reviews. I'm not doing none of that, you know? Like I have my—my circle that—

**Ryan Coogler:** Smart, bro.

**Blitz Bazawule:**—gives me feedback on work, you know?

**Ryan Coogler:** That's so smart.

**Blitz Bazawule:** But—but—but the thing is, like, when—I find that if you are hyper-focused, then all the metrics of that specific creative endeavor mean everything to you, right? So if your book ain't a bestseller, if you're—if—if you're not, you know, a Pulitzer Prize winner, if you're not all these things, then you start to feel less than, right?

**Ryan Coogler:** Yes, bro.

**Blitz Bazawule:** And what I've learned is that, if you just do the work just to do the work and just to go, "You know what, the work exists, and that's the only reason I'm here, is to make sure the work exists," and then I can move on to the next thing without waiting for the metrics to add up. You know, I'm—I'm—just emotionally, I'm in a better place. And it's really about my mental health.

**Ryan Coogler:** Blitz, man, this church—this church right here you talking, bro. I just checked to see if it was Sunday.

[LAUGHTER]

**Blitz Bazawule:** It is—it is Saturday, bro. But—but we can do church.

**Ryan Coogler:** I just—I just checked the calendar, bro, because I was like—I was like, my man preaching because it's so truthful, man. Let me tell you something, bro. I never told you this, man. I never told you this. But you talked about me recommending that book.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yes.

**Ryan Coogler:** We had an exchange, bro, at that conference, man, that really, like, opened something up for me that has never been closed, man. I never had a chance to thank you. You might not even remember this, bro. But you and your band, y'all performed, man, and y'all rocked the stage, bro, at that conference. And that's an insanely white space in 2016, February, Vancouver.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Very.

**Ryan Coogler:** Cold.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Very.

**Ryan Coogler:** And the rooms was predominantly white. I got to imagine it's different now, you know what I'm saying? Like, if you go to the conference.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Of course.

**Ryan Coogler:** But that is what it was in '16. You know, we was in there. And I remember after, man—y'all killed it, bro. And I hollered at you immediately after to tell you how much I loved it, and I could tell something had frustrated you, you know what I'm saying? And I say, "Hey, man"—I say, "Bro, you good?" And it was somebody after the performance who I think might've tapped you on the shoulder and said, "Hey, man, great energy out there." And you said, "Man, what they don't understand is what I just did was scientific." You know?

**Blitz Bazawule:** Wow. I forgot that.

**Ryan Coogler:** It blew my mind, bro.

**Blitz Bazawule:** I forgot that.

**Ryan Coogler:** Because you were able to articulate—you articulated my experience watching you perform in that space, and you articulated an experience that I've had before at different times in my life, you know, where I'm giving my all at something, and it wasn't recognized for what it was, you know what I mean? Because of the culture that it was wrapped in.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yes, yes.

**Ryan Coogler:** And I've carried that, bro. I've thought about that moment, bro.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Damn.

**Ryan Coogler:** Not just the moment but how you articulated it. I've thought about that, bro, for like—since that day.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Oh, I forgot that.

**Ryan Coogler:** I can't look at a person of African descent doing anything the same, bro, like cooking, sports, entertainment, things that are, on the surface, scientific, things that aren't, acts which might be deemed as criminal, all of these things. Like, something in me shifted.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Wow.

**Ryan Coogler:** And it also made me, like, understand you. And I said, "This dude is going to go far, man."

**Blitz Bazawule:** Wow, bro.

**Ryan Coogler:** Like, just an exchange that you were able to have a moment like that, and then articulate it to me. So, you know, you broke it down so clearly. I said, "Man, this dude's going to be big," and it was—it was some truth in that that also, like, gave me a lot of relief just in terms of, like, extending people grace, bro, when they try to judge what we do through this lens, you know what I—you know what I mean?

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yes, very narrow lens, very narrow lens.

**Ryan Coogler:** It's like having an extreme telephoto lens on a camera in a place that should have a wide shot.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Absolutely, absolutely. Absolutely. Man, bro, you—you just reminded me—man, you reminded me of something that I've been—you know, and we still deal with that, you know what I mean? We're still dealing with the fact that our creative—like, somehow we're just spontaneously, like, combusting, you know what I mean? Like, like—like, when—when you make art—

**Ryan Coogler:** Totally.

**Blitz Bazawule:** When you make art, it's science, bro. Like, you know, you're taking all those things that you've—you're synthesizing it through a scientific prism, you know what I mean? And—and it—and I think, for me, the challenge is—you know, for instance, when they see, like, a drum circle, right, a drum circle that is, like—that is—it's science. Like, everybody knows what exact moment to hit that drum, you know what I mean? Like, like—and—but it will never—versus a symphony orchestra. And that, for me, has been something that I've been—you know, I—I—I've come to understand the prisms are different, and it's important—it wouldn't matter if we could both appreciate our prisms, you know what I mean? And, like you said, if we could all do the wide shot.

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah.

**Blitz Bazawule:** You know, if everybody could come in and go, "Okay, we all got to experience this is a wide," you know, as opposed to this extreme closeup where you're honing in on something that isn't truly representative.

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

**Ryan Coogler:** So now we going to get into our segment, which is called Prox Recs. And this is where our Proximity host and our guest give the audience one recommendation that might be helpful for them in their professional or personal lives.

My Prox Rec is going to be a little bit of—a little bit of a cheat this time. I'm going to recommend Blitz's album, Diasporadical. That's going to be my Prox Rec today. Y'all search on y'all streaming platforms for Blitz the Ambassador, Diasporadical album. I love that album.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Thank you, brother.

**Ryan Coogler:** It's a beautiful representation of some of the things that we talking about. The artwork on it is beautiful. I think Blitz did that himself, as well.

**Blitz Bazawule:** No, I did not. I did not.

**Ryan Coogler:** Oh, you didn't do it? Okay.

**Blitz Bazawule:** No, no, no, no.

**Ryan Coogler:** Who did that art?

**Blitz Bazawule:** A brilliant artist called Oliver did it. Oliver's great. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Ryan Coogler:** Okay. So shouts out to Oliver. But Blitz is a—is a phenomenal visual artist, as well, painter. So I thought that might have been him on that. But big shouts out to Oliver.

But I would ask that you guys engage with that album. I think y'all would love it, find it motivating. It's great to write to, great to listen to in the car. That's my Prox Rec. But Blitz, where you at with it?

**Blitz Bazawule:** Thanks, man. For me, man, it would be the Steve Jobs bio, man. I think every creative person should read it. It's written by Walter Isaacson. It's one of the most incredible books I've read, just in terms of what it takes to see a brilliant idea through, you know? The other thing I learned about that book, from that book was this idea of end-to-end encryption, right, and this idea that you don't only, you know, create the software. You create the hardware, and you create the marketing schemes, and you create the stores in which your work will live. And we were just talking about—a second ago about, you know, marketing as the final frontier of filmmaking, right? And—and the fact that the artist has to be responsible for the entire gamut. Like, you can't do a bit of it and feel like, oh, that's all. You know, you have to be able to handle the entire thing. So it's just—it's a huge inspiration for me. It also taught me about retreats, you know what I mean, for groups. My crew, Inward Gaze, man, we take—we take retreats, myself, Gaby, Natalia, Taren. We go out, you know, different cities and just camp out, you know, and talk about the vision for the company and the vision for things that we want to do, you know? So incredible book worth reading.

**Ryan Coogler:** Steve Jobs by Walter Isaacson. Blitz, man, it's been amazing spending some time with you.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Bro, it's a honor, privilege.

**Ryan Coogler:** I'm thankful you took out the time because I know you busy, man. It means a lot to us at Proximity, and I think—I got to imagine audiences will appreciate hearing from you, man. And best of luck, man, finishing up *The Color Purple*.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Thank you.

**Ryan Coogler:** I'm so looking forward to it coming out this Christmas.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Yeah. It's an incredible cast, man. I'm very lucky to have, you know, such brilliant, talented people, Colman Domingo, Taraji P. Henson, Danielle Brooks, Corey Hawkins, Fantasia Barrino, just—Halle Bailey, Jon Batiste. Bro, it's—Aunjanue Ellis, you know—

[MUSIC FADES IN]

**Ryan Coogler:** Murderers' Row.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Bro—bro, it was—talk about a blessing, and again—again, for me, I just want to say thank you. Thank you to you, Zinzi. Thank you to the Proximity crew, man.

[In Proximity Theme by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]



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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 editing for this episode is by Cameron Kell.

Special thanks to the whole Proximity Media team and to you for listening to In Proximity. Meet you back here next week.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

[MUSIC STOPS]

**Blitz Bazawule:** Color Purple is a great launchpad for us. And God willing, my book, which we didn't really even talk about, you know, but it has been optioned by FX, and we're in the midst of turning that into a six-part series for FX.

**Ryan Coogler:** Amazing. Congratulations, bro.

**Blitz Bazawule:** Thank you, brother. Thank you. So, you know, like, even that, it's like, that's something that Inward Gaze is slowly building up to in terms of its muscle. And bro, you know, I'll be calling you.

[LAUGHTER]

**Ryan Coogler:** Nah, nah, y'all off to the races, man. That's incredible news, Blitz.