

The Editor's Cut - Episode 064 - "EditCon 2021: Breaking the Mold in Series TV"

[show open]

Sarah Taylor:

Hello, and welcome to The Editor's Cut. I'm your host, Sarah Taylor.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to point out that the lands on which we have created this podcast and that many of you may be listening to us from are part of ancestral territory. It is important for all of us to deeply acknowledge that we are on ancestral territory that has long served as a place where indigenous peoples have lived, met, and interacted.

We honor, respect, and recognize these nations that have never relinquished their rights or sovereign authority over the lands and waters on which we stand today. We encourage you to reflect on the history of the land, the rich culture, the many contributions and the concerns that impact indigenous individuals and communities. Land acknowledgements are the start to a deeper action.

[show open]

Today's episode is part six of our six-part series covering EditCon 2021 that took place in February of 2021, Breaking the Mold in Series TV.

We're currently experiencing a watershed moment for increased representation in storytelling. This year, we've seen a wealth of stories originating from the BIPOC, LGBTQs plus, and female perspectives that not only tackle tough topics surrounding mental health, addiction, sexual assault, and racial prejudice, but also present powerful aesthetics and editorial triumphs.

The editors behind I May Destroy You, Euphoria, and Black As Fuck join us to discuss their groundbreaking work. This panel was moderated by award-winning director, storyteller, and producer, Shauna Foster.

Intro Voices:

And action. This is The Editors Cut, a CCE podcast exploring, exploring, exploring the art of picture editing.

Shauna Foster:

Let's start by thanking the CCE and welcoming everybody to EditCon 2021. I just want to take the time to introduce our panelists.

So we have Christine Armstrong and Shannon Baker Davis from Black As Fuck, #blackAF; Christian Sandino-Taylor from I May Destroy You; and Julio C. Perez from Euphoria. So we are super lucky today to have you all here.

Thank you for being with us. I May Destroy You, #blackAF, Euphoria are shows that definitely line with today's theme for discussion, which is Breaking The Mold in Series Television.

These are three shows that, through their story, through content, through structure, through editing, through the creative teams, definitely align with breaking molds. To break molds, we have to be daring.

We have to be daring. And there's a lot of discourse out there where the creators behind these shows, they talk about these shows coming from deeply personal places and from personal experiences.

And I just want to quickly read a quote that Sam Levinson, who's the creator of Euphoria, said. He said, "I just wrote myself as a teenager. I think those feelings and memories are still extremely accessible to me, so it's not hard to reach."

And this notion of feelings and memories being extremely accessible is applicable, I think, to all these shows and the way that shows lift off the screen in such an explicit way, and so with the notion in mind of being vulnerable and being daring, let's start with the question, how do you all as editors manage the process in a way that supports the creator and the personal element of each story? And let's start with Christine.

Christine Armstrong:

I think it's just being able to create a creative space. My favorite times in the edit suite, in the edit room, is when the showrunner is just having fun and just in the creative juices.

And I'm able to create that for them, and kind of when they have different ideas and everything, just kind of playing in the sandbox, I think, is the best way to kind of support them because this is all about being creative, and it's a collaborative process. And even creating that space in the edit suite, I think, is the best way to support.

Shauna Foster:

Thank you. Julio.

Julio C. Perez:

So speaking of vulnerability, that's how I feel right now, very vulnerable. But I think for me, I mean, there's a lot of different approaches, I think, to this.

But for me, it's sort of starting with the foundation of sort of the philosophy of what kind of editor that I'd like to be, and when you're, one, interested in things that are tonally complicated and intricate, disturbing sometimes, emotional, and then also being very interested in working with directors of vision and conviction... And then for me as an editor, to do everything with my skillset and everything within my powers as an editor to help hone and possibly even enhance that vision, do everything I can to get it out in the world at its optimal state. And I care about what the director and/or showrunner wants to say, and I desperately want to help bring that out into the world, I guess.

Shauna Foster:

Thank you, Julio.

Julio C. Perez:

Thank you.

Shauna Foster:

Christian.

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, just sort of, I suppose, echoing what Christine and Julio have already said, I mean, it's all about the edit suite, such as we all know and I'm sure the audience who are watching.

It's a sort of priest's hold, isn't it? It's a place of trust.

There's two of you, and they're getting to know each other. I mean, I think a big thing is, especially on these three shows where you have these very powerful voices and distinct voices, you want to get to know the people you're working with, right?

I mean, in order to sort of please them and challenge them at times and surprise them, you have to get to know them. So I think, as Christine was saying about playing, I was saying to a lot of people, like Michaela, for example, is such a great person to talk to.

She'll come in, and you'll start talking, and then 10 minutes later, you're talking about your divorced parents. And you sort of build on these things, and you start to get to know each other.

And I think our job as editors a lot of the time is to get to know our directors or whoever the creative force is behind the projects we're working on, so not psychoanalyze them but understand them and be sympathetic to them. And then we know we can be the best creative partner we can be for them.

But yeah, play and trust is, I suppose, the big thing. As soon as you have creative trust with each other, then you can go anywhere. And yeah...

Shauna Foster:

And Shannon.

Shannon Baker:

I think everything that's been said, of course, I agree with. I live those themes all the time.

I think something that hasn't been said is that I think directors and producer writers expect you to bring yourself to the project so that the part of you that is triggered or the part of you that questions a character's motivation, all of those things come into the edit and give what you're doing so many layers, because if you are not bringing the real world and your experiences to it, it becomes kind of blank.

And like Christian said, you get into it when you have these conversations, and your producer or your director is sitting on the couch. And they're tired, and they've been with it for so long, and I think they expect you to bring something to it that they maybe haven't heard or haven't thought of, and I always aim to be that sort of editor.

I don't want to just push buttons or blankly just cut the script together. That's just not the kind of person that I am.

Shauna Foster:

Since I have you on, Shannon, I'm going to go around again with this question. Do you get to do the first pass?

Shannon Baker:

Yes.

Shauna Foster:

Is the process you get to do the first pass and then they come in, or are they with you?

Shannon Baker:

Normally, for the television shows, you get to do an editor's cut. That's part of bringing your ideas to it. Some of that stuff may get vetoed, and it goes through many, many iterations, but it's always a feather in your cap when a scene you cut exactly the way you cut it ends up in the final product.

Sometimes, you're like, "Oh, I keyed in. That particular day, I keyed into something."

And you're always looking for that high, but yeah, you get to do a first pass that is yours. And a lot of times, some of the best editors that have mentored me always say, "That's your pass."

"That's your pass. Do what you want to do to it. Stay within the tone of the overall series, but it is yours," because it might not be yours after you release to the director [crosstalk 00:10:06] no longer.

Christine Armstrong:

Yeah.

Shauna Foster:

Is that a similar experience for everybody in terms of doing that first pass?

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

In the UK, I mean, I don't know if maybe I'm wrong about this in general, but my experience has been... Maybe we have less time than you guys, but two days after they wrap, the director's in.

So for us, and I May Destroy You is completely different and is a kind of crazy one because we had a mad deadline to hit. So basically, we finished, and bear in mind, Michaela is writing and acting and co-directing.

She comes in two days later, and then basically, there's six editors going at the same time, and she's just dancing between us, so I don't know. It's interesting.

For me personally, I was not trained as an editor. I wasn't assisting or anything, so sort of my way has always been, in a way, in reacting to that, has just been to go for it on the assembly.

So exactly, as you were saying, Shannon: All of the stuff I want to try and put out, I'll just throw into that. But we don't get the luxury of a kind of necessarily first proper pass.

The director's in two days later, and you're going through it, and then it depends on the director, so on this, Michaela's in and out, off over there. She has to jump between six edits.

So it was specifically quite different, but in general, yeah, we don't get that time. I mean, so do you guys literally get some time to fine cut a first cut for yourselves?

Shannon Baker:

[crosstalk 00:11:46] four days. It's not like you get a whole lot of time. [crosstalk 00:11:48].

But it just depends because block shooting changes everything, changes all of that. And I'm assuming you've done a block shot, so to have six going on at once, it's a different thing.

Usually you're just in the round robin, and it depends. Limited series are different, but the director is for hire, and the directors, they're in there for four days, and then the producer writers come in and do the final cut.

Christine Armstrong:

Yeah, you're cutting as they're shooting, and then so I'm shaping my editors cut in that time. And using that time while they're shooting is the best part, because it's just like, you have no holds barred.

You can have any music. You can put everything. It's so great to have that kind of editors cut, to have-

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

And it comes back to what Shannon was saying. I've found, anyway, that the really good directors and creators are always enablers of other people's creativity, right? They want your opinion on stuff.

They want a fresh opinion. I mean, I think that the myth of the director genius, the auteur, is dangerous in that sense because actually, the truth is usually that there's a million people coming up with brilliant ideas all the time, and they're just open to them.

They have good taste. They choose a good one.

Shauna Foster:

Going off that, that's a perfect segue into where we're going next, topic of doing things differently. So in my discussions with each of you, in one way or another, you all talked about how to do the job in a way that's different from what's been traditionally done and this notion of being a little bit anti-establishment, which I think is awesome.

And so let's talk about that a little bit. Let's watch this clip from episode nine of I May Destroy You.

[clip plays]

Shauna Foster:

Hey. [crosstalk 00:15:36].

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

Not my editing though, not my editing. The brilliant Amy Hounsell cut that episode, so props to Amy.

Shauna Foster:

Can we talk about though how the show uses POV and the fracture of time and sound in the cutting? And in episode nine that we just saw, it is definitely very heavy in that episode, but in episode 101, which we saw in the trailer, which just uses everything, all the things, can you talk about how you used that in the cutting?

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

Yeah, and I suppose also the question you asked before about breaking the mold and being anti, all of that stuff, I think what was fun about this show creatively was that Michaela's, she's not someone who's obsessed with television. So I think her obsession is people and their motivations, and she's curious about the world and systems.

She has a real sort of amazing, kind of omnivorously curious intellect, so what's interesting is when they shot all this stuff, and we were sort of able to shape it in an interesting way as long as it reflected the script... So yeah, the first episode, when the lead character, she's drugged and then comes round and then basically has post-traumatic stress and a panic attack, it was just a way of trying to find a way of doing that on screen.

So I don't know if anyone remembers in the beginning montage, there's sort of a jump cut sort of drug sequence where time starts to go back and mix, and then there's the hardest of hard cuts intended to be the most horrible, sort of badly timed cut ever when she comes to later in the morning, which is also biographical from Michaela's experience. And then basically, time starts to fracture again, which I was reading a bit about post-traumatic stress and how the brain starts to protect itself by rearranging time, so you forget things.

It's basically protecting you, and so that's what we start to do when she goes into the toilet and stuff like this, but I suppose we were never trying to be anti-establishment. We were just free to just try and tell the story.

So I suppose that was a nice thing about working with Michaela and Sam is Sam's very encouraging. Sam's the co-director.

He's done lots of television, all sorts of different styles down the years, and Michaela's just one of these people who just sees the world fresh. So you were kind of encouraged to just do this sequence as you were interested.

And of course, we had support from HBO and the execs and everyone who were just like, "Yeah, do it. If you have an idea, let's do it."

And within the confines of, we had 12 episodes of half an hour, we had to hit those marks. But other than that, we were kind of free to just investigate anything we could do, and there was no style guide.

There was nothing. There was no conversation about that. It sort of evolved from episode one, I guess.

We sort of got that down first with music and everything, but it was an ongoing conversation. And the use of point of view... And that is a good example. Point of view is such a delicate thing, isn't it?

You stay with a character for 20 frames, and you're with them in that moment, and then you stay with the next character for another 20 frames, and you're with them, and you change the shot, et cetera. But yeah, it was interesting because I think when someone says to you, "Hey, I want to do something different and fuck things up," I always think, "Why?" You have to know to just do it is a teenage thing, just stick two fingers up to establishment figures.

I think you just have to have a reason, and I think for us, I don't think we ever thought we were doing that. It was never discussed.

If it came out in that way, it was because of the source material, because of what Michaela was writing about. She's writing about characters and institutions and ideas in flux and change.

And anything we did as editors, playfully or consciously whatever, was just a way of trying to deal with very complex subject matter, stuff that is dramatic ironies; characters where one minute you love, one minute you're questioning their motivations; all sorts of philosophical counterpoints. Basically, it's a show where everyone has their own truth, and they just keep clashing, so how do you do that?

You don't follow a single emotional narrative. So yeah, I guess I'm rabbiting on, but yeah, I guess it's just interesting that we never talked about [crosstalk 00:20:46].

And I think that's because Michaela isn't one of these people who knows every episode of Friends or even cares about television enough to have an argument with it. Television happens to be the medium where she told that story.

And it could well have been a play or a poem. She's done all sorts of things, and that's really refreshing because it means you're not part of this industry.

And suddenly, you are not doing the things you normally do because you're not having conversations about it. There are a lot of examples where you have this amazing footage where you think, "Oh, great,

I'll just lay down a sad track, and I'll win her a BAFTA for best actress because she's doing something amazing.

"I'll just play the emotion of the scene, and we'll win every award in town." But she was saying, "No, no, no. We don't want to use emotion."

It's such a seductive thing to manipulate people in a good way, that we all do it. We love it, but she wanted to make a show that was about ideas and was about argument.

And as soon as you privilege one idea by making it emotional, then we all tend to follow that story, whereas if you just hold back and don't play for the normal things that we are asked to do in shows and dramas and movies, techniques she probably learned in the theater... And she talks about art cinema, and these distancing techniques to ask us to make the decision ourselves, because she's not someone who has any answers. She's someone who's continually questioning the world.

Shauna Foster:

Thank you, Christian. Can we play this clip from episode five? We're going to watch something from #blackAF.

[clip plays]

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

These are good shows, guys. I'm very proud to be on a panel [crosstalk 00:24:34].

Julio C. Perez:

Amen. Amen. I'm dying, man.

Shauna Foster:

[crosstalk 00:24:38]. Yeah. Shannon, can you talk about the challenges of cutting that scene? Because I believe [crosstalk 00:24:44] everything there was filmed separately. Am I correct?

Shannon Baker:

They all-

Shauna Foster:

It was all filmed separately?

Shannon Baker:

... filmed separately-

Shauna Foster:

So yeah, what were-

Shannon Baker:

... six separate-

Shauna Foster:

... what were some of the challenges that you had?

Shannon Baker:

[crosstalk 00:24:55]. It took me three or four days to do that one scene, and on a television schedule, that's a lot, but they shot everyone separately. Most of the time, Kenya was not there.

Sometimes he was there on the phone talking to them as they shot in their trailers or wherever they were, because they did it iPhone style. And they're all very, very funny people that do improv.

And they did a lot of improv, and he just wanted to get all of that in, but one person couldn't have known the improv line that the other person did because they did it separately. So it was about finding reactions and trying to...

There was a script, but the improv is so good that it was about finding reactions and lining them up and lining up Kenya's reaction to all of that. And yeah, that was one of the scenes that I was like, "Please don't let anyone try and pull this apart," because it's like Jenga.

You pull that one thing, and the whole thing would come tumbling down, and it pretty much stayed the same. There were a couple of jokes that we had to take out because they were, I guess, insulting or whatever.

[crosstalk 00:26:22] too much? Should we say this?

Should we pull back? But for the most part, they went for it.

Kenya went for it, and it's a tough thing because the whole episode is about critics, and it's a tough thing when you decide to talk about critics in your medium that is critiqued by critics. So that was an interesting rollercoaster to ride, but yeah, that scene was one of my favorites.

Shauna Foster:

Thank you, Shannon.

Julio C. Perez:

So good.

Shauna Foster:

I love your [crosstalk 00:27:02]-

Julio C. Perez:

So good.

Christine Armstrong:

[crosstalk 00:27:02] Shannon. That's so funny.

Shauna Foster:

So good. We're going to continue on-

Christine Armstrong:

[crosstalk 00:27:06] funny as hell.

Shauna Foster:

I feel like if you all have questions, you could pipe in too. I don't got to ask all the questions because everyone's [crosstalk 00:27:15], so I feel like-

Shannon Baker:

I love I May Destroy You. I love Euphoria, so I'm just sitting here-

Christine Armstrong:

Yeah, I love them too, big fan.

Shauna Foster:

So tell me-

Julio C. Perez:

Oh yeah. No, I feel like I'm standing right now for everything. It's amazing to be a part of this as far as excited about the work I do.

But then I mean, watching... Is #blackAF the official way to say it during this panel? But I was just absolutely just laughing out loud with the headphones on late at night where Anna, my spouse, is going to bed.

But I'm laughing in the living room, and I'm like, "Did I wake her?" Because I mean, I was rolling.

And with I May Destroy You, the incredible texture between the lighter comedic moments that could be acerbic and then instantly shifting to something very deep and personal and dealing with some real trauma and hurt, those turn on a dime. I mean, both shows are great, so I'm stoked to be here.

Shauna Foster:

We're going to continue with #blackAF. We're going to play a clip from episode number two.

[clip plays]

Julio C. Perez:

Nice.

Christine Armstrong:

I had so [crosstalk 00:29:50].

Julio C. Perez:

[crosstalk 00:29:50] Butterfly Festival, that's right.

Shauna Foster:

Christine, Shannon already a little bit touched on this, but I'm curious to know, because the show incorporates a lot of improv, what were some of the challenges in cutting that episode, if there's any sort of devices that you may have used? Perhaps because when there's so much improv, you might not have

the most seamless footage to work with because of all the improv, and so can you talk to us a little bit about cutting that episode?

Christine Armstrong:

Yeah, for sure. What's kind of great about this episode or this show is it's very mockumentary documentary style, and there was a lot of camera movements and everything. So especially in this whole scene at the festival, I used a lot of wipes to cut, if that makes sense, to hide the cut, and adding more jokes and stuff like that.

And that's kind of what I kind of about comedy too is the challenge of improv and all that kind of stuff, because you kind of can rewrite the jokes in a sense. And I just loved all of that stuff that he was saying about the headdress with her friend, so I was like, "I have to include this, and this has to be in the cut."

And so it's so much fun to be able to rewrite the show in that way and put in all the funny jokes, and you have so many options and so many different ways you can cut the scene and so many jokes. And so maybe that's the challenge is just trying to pick and kind of rewrite the whole scene to make it as funny as possible.

And it's kind of great because in that scene, they had the iPhone, and then they had the different cameras and all that kind of stuff. And it was just lucky, and I was just happy of how it all kind of came together, and it was really fun.

Shauna Foster:

It looks fun. I wish I was there.

Christine Armstrong:

It was so cool because they created a whole festival for that episode, so it was a fake music festival, of course, after Coachella and all that kind of stuff. And they just did it in a hanger in a lot in California and just made that whole place look like a whole festival, and I thought that was really well done.

Shannon Baker:

[inaudible 00:32:08] big scenes like that [crosstalk 00:32:11].

Christine Armstrong:

I know.

Shannon Baker:

Crowd replacement and stuff now is the [crosstalk 00:32:16].

Christine Armstrong:

The effect [crosstalk 00:32:17] is going to have a lot of work to do in the future.

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

Can I ask you three a question? Just watching those clips, and Julio, from what I know about Euphoria and Sam, both of your bosses... this is true of Michaela as well... they're sort of really flailing themselves, aren't they, on screen? They're using very super personal stuff or their personas.

I don't [inaudible 00:32:45] Michaela, but sometimes you're sitting there thinking, "Wow, you are brave to do this and put this out into the world." Did you find you had to encourage them?

I mean, what was that like? Because they're seriously personal things, both the creators, all three of them, are putting out there. How was that [crosstalk 00:33:06]?

Christine Armstrong:

Especially them acting in it as well.

Shannon Baker:

[crosstalk 00:33:08] acting-

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

Yeah, exactly.

Shannon Baker:

... first time acting in it, yeah. Ours was heavily leaning on race and race in the industry that he's still trying to make product in.

And granted, he's he's a super producer, and he can do what he wants most places, but he still talked about certain things and still has to go into meetings with people that may have committed some of these race aggressions. So there was a lot of, he would ask me, "Should we talk about this?"

And for the most part, I was like, "Yes, because people are talking about it." So it's the same with kind of I May Destroy You.

It happens. It happens to people, so it resonates.

And they it's definitely had to be brave or brazen. I don't know what the word for it is.

It's weird to call it bravery because they're just being who they are, and there's no magical thing to it, and it shouldn't be that way. It shouldn't be like, "Oh, you're so brave to talk about issues that everybody's dealing with on a daily basis," that kind of thing.

Christine Armstrong:

I feel like all our creators or all our showrunners are being very vulnerable to their audience, which is kind of nice because you kind of feel connected in that sense. It's like, "Oh, I'm not the only one who feels this way or anything." And especially them putting themselves in the forefront too and putting themselves in it, I think, is also vulnerable and brave, as you say, for them.

Shauna Foster:

Being your authentic self in the world.

Julio C. Perez:

You hear it in ways that become a little bit cliché about an artist needing courage to the point where you don't really know what courage is. You don't know what that means because, oh, this show becomes popular or this or that.

What do you mean? How courageous is it?

But when you blend this autobiographical material, and you blend it with this incredible, fantastical realms, and it's really hard to tell where imagination and reality begin and end; they sort of blend into each other; I think there's a courage in the writing stage and then a courage to present it and an obsessiveness linked with that courage to actually have it fully realized through the editorial process. And I find it a really rare quality in directors and showrunners.

But I'm amazed by Levinson and courage, just tons of courage, to the point of sometimes recklessness, because he just believes in what the show needs to be and what he wants to say. And he has to do it.

It's a compulsion, and it's amazing to be a part of it. I'm inspired by it daily, and actually, in a bit of a contrast, actually, sometimes as editor, I'm like, "Whoa, should we be saying this? Is this okay?"

Or I actually will bring up some caveats and concerns, and we'll talk it out and figure it out and see and decide whether it stays or goes. And then that discussion extends to the producers when their concerns come up in notes, and then the HBO execs and drama, HBO, they'll air their concerns as well.

And then Sam and I will have those long discussions, like, "Okay, do we agree with this? How does this enhance the narrative that we're telling? How does it shift characterization?"

You get in these long discussions. I feel really blessed to be working with someone with as much courage and audacity as Sam Levinson. It's pretty awesome.

Shauna Foster:

Nice. Thank you.

Shannon Baker:

I feel like it's your job as an editor to come at it from all angles, and if somebody says something on Twitter when it comes out, and you didn't think of that, you're like, "Why didn't I think of that?" [crosstalk 00:37:47] may think about it, and I just want to present all those ifs.

Julio C. Perez:

Yeah, that's why I'm not on Twitter.

Shannon Baker:

Hashtag get off. [crosstalk 00:38:02].

Christine Armstrong:

Yeah, it's interesting because as the editor, we're the first audience, because we're the only people who weren't on set, even though sometimes you visit, but weren't on set. And we're the first test audience in a weird way because we're kind of cutting it for other people, but I've been cutting it for myself too and being like, "This is how see it," so it's a gift that we get to do that.

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

If I can also add, when we were cutting it, I had no idea that I May Destroy You would be what it... I mean, I know that when a show gets big or popular or has a cultural impact, you can never predict these things.

I was more worried, I was like, "God, are people going to stay with it on episode three?" I had these stupid, pretty minor worries.

I had no idea, and then I remember I had to help out getting some clips for a thing and seeing episode two, and bear in mind, we've been seeing each other's episodes. Normally on a show, you're bored. You've seen it a million times, right? And you've pretty numb to it, but it's one of the first times I've ever been on a show where I was like, "Wow, that is something."

I didn't think it would be popular, and I definitely didn't think it would blow up in the way it's done and that it'd end up me talking to you guys. But what Shannon said, I think, is really true, that these three creators are just being themselves and that we've come on that train ride, and they don't think twice. And so yeah, like you guys in the edit, I personally just didn't think twice about any of the things we put in it and let the execs or the networks worry, if they were going to worry. Most of the times, we had amazing support from HBO and BBC. They didn't really get in the way.

Shauna Foster:

Let's watch a clip from Euphoria-

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

We've been in lockdown for a year. I need to speak.

Julio C. Perez:

Get it out. Get it out.

Christine Armstrong:

[crosstalk 00:40:02] Christian.

[clip plays]

Christine Armstrong:

I must say, that's one of my favorite Euphoria episodes. It's so great.

Shauna Foster:

Yes, yes. It's so fun.

Julio C. Perez:

Thank you so much.

Shauna Foster:

It's so fun. I mean, Julio, so-

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

[crosstalk 00:40:35] I'm telling you.

Shauna Foster:

In our discussion, you talked about knowing tradition in order to subvert it, and how did that play into cutting the carnival scene? Which I believe you cut on site.

Julio C. Perez:

I did. Yeah.

Shauna Foster:

Actually, let's go with that, and then I'll ask the other question after. Let's start with that.

Julio C. Perez:

All right, great. So yes, much like the Lunar Butterfly Festival in #blackAF, or should I say Black As Fuck or #blackAF?

Shauna Foster:

Whatever you want.

Julio C. Perez:

All right, great. I'll keep it family friendly since it's a panel.

Shauna Foster:

No judgment either way.

Julio C. Perez:

#blackAF, much like that Coachella-esque festival atmosphere, they actually put a real carnival down right there somewhere in Pomona, and yeah, they brought Sam. And Marcell Rév, the cinematographer, spent a lot of time planning it out and also storyboarding very, very intricately.

And Sam wanted to make sure, especially with the stitches at the top, wanted to make sure that they got it right, so that was the primary motivator. But then it ended up being just go ahead and cut alongside camera as much as I can right there where they'd pop into the room and get excited or be very, very distraught.

No, I think they usually ended up being okay with it. But so, yeah, that was an adventure, and then as far as with tradition and subverting it, I think part of me that's locked inside me is still a teenage boy.

And so the way I can channel that into this show, I think, is very joyous, and I feel very fulfilled by that. But I think as a teenager, I had a bit of the iconoclast in me, always wanting to find a different answer than what the generalized establishment had for us or what society at large might say.

And I'd be like, "But what about this?" As I've gotten older and moved along in my career and watched more and more film more deeply as well as some series, I feel like you see the traditions that you played in, even if you didn't know it, early in your career.

And for the carnival in particular, I think you can look at, for instance, these interlocking narratives with a plural protagonist, so to speak, where you have these different characters, and they're intertwining, and their ideas and lives, little snatches of it you catch here and there.

I feel like it's hard to not think about Robert Altman as a filmmaker and his influence in telling those kind of tales. He took it to certain heights with 3 Women and Nashville and Short Cuts, things like that, and then so he might cast a long shadow from the new American cinema of the late sixties and into the seventies.

And then you have how that might have been interpreted by American filmmakers in the nineties, American independent filmmakers like Paul Thomas Anderson and the way he employed very similar storytelling techniques in Magnolia. So you start to look at, let's say, the traditions that are very deeply entrenched in American filmmaking from classical Hollywood, and you adapt some of those techniques or techniques of using establishing shots.

And how do you subvert that? How do you do something a little different yet get the information across? Sometimes you want to pay homage to something that you consider exceptional, but then never wanting to lean on convention for its own sake, that when you start to sniff something out as being overly conventional, you start wanting to find angles around it, over it, under it, away from it, whatever you need. And then once in a while, you might use the on-the-nose conventional technique or device in order to have clarity for the audience.

So then you can kind of go on a wild ride of unconventional storytelling, and you still have them because you gave the audience a grounding. So then you can go on these flights of fancy.

I acknowledge and admire those that went before us as filmmakers, and we have to forge our own path with today's ideas, what's going on in our society right now, in this moment. And to me, there's always going to be resistance to something that isn't conventional.

Even if it becomes popular, you're going to have factions that want to, let's say, knock it down a little bit, take you down a peg or whatever. That's fine.

That's part of the game, but I'd say it's just the way that I'm built, and the collaborators and the brilliant directors and writer directors and showrunners that I've ended up with, we have a kindred spirit. It's like, here's what we call normal or conventional.

Well, how do we mess it up? How do we forge a new path?

How do we innovate? And it's an exciting thing to just dream on it.

And then to actually get a chance to execute it on certain types of shows or films, it feels indulgent and just so, so beautifully decadent. I get a chance to engage in that kind of cultural dialogue. I feel it's just the best, just exciting and beautiful.

Christine Armstrong:

That's so great. [crosstalk 00:46:46].

Speaker 7:

That is good.

Julio C. Perez:

Well, thank you. [crosstalk 00:46:51].

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

You can see the joy and the love of cinema, especially. Even just that clip, I'm going, "Yeah, Magnolia, Boogie Nights, 400 Blows. Oh my God."

You can see [crosstalk 00:47:05] love. You can see it.

It's in that lineage, and it's so lovely that also, cinema is in such a state that it's so lovely that you guys are doing that with the camera, with style. Yeah, I'm of that. I love the people you're talking about, and to me-

Julio C. Perez:

Amen.

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

... I'm not going to dump on Marvel or anything, but I want independent filmmakers to be given \$70 million to make a film as well as Marvel.

Julio C. Perez:

Absolutely. We need those mid to large budgets back. We need to fight for it because, well, what it is, and it's wonderful, what's occurred with series work, is that television series and streaming has sort of, let's say, substituted and sort of drawn some energy for better and... I don't know if worse is the word for it, but I think there are effects that do maybe harm the state of cinema, but then we do have a bit of a fluorescence of somewhat or very cinematic series I'd say at a fairly high level compared to what it was in the past.

But I am deep in my heart a spiritual warrior for filmmaking and for cinema. That-

Christine Armstrong:

That was perfectly timed.

Julio C. Perez:

I feel it so deeply, so I'm with you. I feel like if we can get enough people that feel similarly, and let's continue to not only fly the flag of cinema but also celebrate in series work where the cinematic and the bold...

And what we're talking about here, there's that mold; I want to break it. Let's break the hell out of that mold.

Christine Armstrong:

That's what I like about the streaming services, because working for Netflix and Amazon, I feel like they're giving the creators this freedom because there's no time limit to where you can make that space, and I feel the difference in that kind of energy.

Shauna Foster:

I feel it too, Christine. [crosstalk 00:49:27].

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

I mean, I don't know about American networks, but in England, shows like *I May Destroy You*, you can't imagine them happening before all of the streaming services and HBO all upped the ante and upped the quality of work. And we've all had dumb exec notes, but they were great on this, I think because they recognized that shows like *Black as Fuck* and *Euphoria* are out there.

So you can't pull your punches, not that Michaela's ever going to do that. But I think for the general level of dramatic and comedic quality, it's great, because you can go, "Hey, look at these great shows.

"They're huge. They're successful on these huge platforms, and look at what they do."

Because I know we've talked about how our creators are just being themselves, but for execs and commissioners, they look on those as massive risks. They look on, "You want to do it in one shot? No. Sorry, mate."

"You want to say that? You want to get Ava DuVernay to say that?"

I think it's so exciting, like you say, that these shows are coming out and being watched by millions, and I think you're right, Julio. In the nineties when I was younger, both of these shows might have been independent movies developed at Sundance and taken to can and stuff.

But we are lucky that they're out there somewhere, and not just somewhere; they're huge. They're all over billboards and on these massive streaming services.

So yeah, we're lucky, and yeah, amazing [crosstalk 00:51:13]. Yeah, exactly.

Shannon Baker:

Well, there's also more opportunity for ideas. Because there are so many shows, I feel like the shows that are trying to push the needle, they have so many more episodes to do that.

When you had just independent features was the only outlet, how often did one of those come along where, on a series, you have four or five different directors; you have four editors; everyone is getting involved, and there's more ideas in the pot, and that makes everything better?

Christine Armstrong:

So true, Shannon.

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

Yeah. I mean, look at these three shows. They're amazingly different shows that all pursue the truth in their different ways.

And there's so many different pleasures just in these three shows. What an amazing watch viewers have if they watch these three shows.

Completely different views of the world, completely different styles, genres. In terms of TV, we're very lucky to be working now, aren't we?

Shauna Foster:

All right, we are winding down a little bit, so I want to get to this last bit of stuff we have. Can we show episode one, a clip from Euphoria?

[clip plays]

Shauna Foster:

Wow. This is from episode "The Pilot." This is the pilot.

And before I ask this next question, I want to share this with you. So in a discussion with Julio, he said, "The moment you define art, you miss it.

"The most important thing about art and its function is building empathy to change the idea of being an addict with a capital A to being a human being who just needs the world means something. The moment someone feels less alone because of something I did, I've done my job."

I'm getting emotional. [crosstalk 00:55:26]. The question is, is there a specific moment, episode, scene, a time when you're in a cutting room where this became especially clear for each of you, where you felt like, "I did my job"? Let's start with Christine on this one.

Christine Armstrong:

Man, there's just so many moments that are magic that happens in the edit suite. Sometimes I think for me, when I'm working with a showrunner or a creator on a film or a TV show, and they're watching it, and they've created it; they've wrote it; they've watched it; they've watched all the footage; and they're still evoking emotion, I feel that's a great thing for me, because I think in the sense, sometimes when you watch the medium over and over again, you kind of get lost in it.

And to be able to bring back that person who knows it's coming, who knows that the laughter's going to be there or there's a sad moment, and they are still emotionally involved and invested, I feel I've done a good job in terms of that, I think, because if they, who've seen it many times, and people who are going to see it many times are going to still have that feeling. So that's kind of my mark, I guess, what comes off my head.

Shauna Foster:

Thank you, Christine.

Julio C. Perez:

Awesome.

Shauna Foster:

Shannon.

Shannon Baker:

I don't know. I think I'm the opposite. I think I never know. You never feel like you know. I suffer from imposter complex, so-

Shauna Foster:

Me too.

Shannon Baker:

You too. You too. You feel like you do a good cut, but then they always have to take it away from me, always have to take it away from me, because there could be one more frame that could do something, or you just try so many different things.

And I always have to try to remember how I felt about it when I first watched the dailies, and I take very extensive notes. Did this one make me cry?

Because we watch people's faces so intently, and the good actors are doing something different every single time. It's very, very subtle.

So you just have to try and remember how you felt about it the first time you watched it and trust that that is still there, but I just never know. I never know.

Christine Armstrong:

That trusting in this whole thing, that's all you have.

Shannon Baker:

[crosstalk 00:57:54] trusting that it didn't get lost in all of the notes and all of the iterations that the cut goes through. You kind of have to trust and be like, "Okay, I know I felt this way. Hopefully it's still there."

Christine Armstrong:

And sometimes it's trusting your past self too who was watching it. [crosstalk 00:58:14].

Shannon Baker:

[crosstalk 00:58:15] reading your notes, like, "Why did I say this was good?"

Julio C. Perez:

Yeah. Exactly. That's so hard to do, to maintain that objectivity.

That's the single greatest challenge, I think, is to be just as engaged with the ideas and the form and the technique and the emotional sort of oscillations. To stay engaged with that as you're approaching the final mix, that's the biggest challenge for me ever as an editor is to keep that the sensitivity open and not sort of shut down and become sclerotic, I guess you could say.

Christine Armstrong:

Christian, what about you?

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

Yeah, I mean, kind of echoing everyone else's thoughts, I suppose you just have to believe the thing you've made. You don't know, do you?

You and your director, you try and get it right. You can tell if someone is working with people in the room who aren't you because you can feel if they're in.

You can feel if they're locked in because you're so sensitive to body language of other people when they come and watch it. You can feel when they're locked in.

You know when they're when the shift of a bum means, "Oh, God. Yeah. Okay, yeah, yeah, yeah. I'll cut that scene. Yeah, yeah. I get it. I get it."

But equally, when it goes out into the world, you just don't know, do you? I mean, my partner was kind of like, "Right, we're going to watch episodes one and two when they go out."

And I was like, "Really? Okay." And I watch again, and then after episode one cut to black, she was so proud.

It kind of made me go, "Oh, right. Oh, okay," because I really respect her, but like everyone, you try to do your best. You don't know.

You just hope. We sort of try and be surgeons of emotion and ideas, but ultimately, just then we've all been lucky that other people have felt the same things that we felt on viewing 808 rather than viewing 7,000 or whatever it is when we just can't see the width of the trees. But yeah, same thing, I suppose.

Shauna Foster:

Thank you. Julio, do you want to add to that?

Julio C. Perez:

I completely understand where Shannon's coming from too because I think when you get absorbed in this sort of wash of deadlines and pressures and everything that you have to do, and to just remain sensitive and open to the sort of magnetic presentation of certain performances, to sort of make sure that you're receiving the performances accurately and the little nuances of micro expressions and joy and pain and whatever flashes across a human face, while people are like, "Hey, we got to do this, and by the way, do that. And don't forget, oh, this is a new rule, and everything's going on."

So you can have a low-grade chaos outside your edit bay door, and to maintain that focus is a primary task. That's a foundational task and can be very tricky.

But as far as any one moment, I'm not necessarily a big person for epiphanies. I feel like if I have revelation, it's over time and over experience and from hard knocks and from dealing with this and sort of picking yourself back up and keeping on going, less than that one vision on the mount or anything like that.

But so for me, I'd say specific to season one with Rue and saying like, "I've done my job," I'd say it's after the blur of getting it done, and I barely remember. It was a blur.

I just can't believe we actually got through it and that it was intelligible, and I'm so excited about it. I knew it was a good script, so it's even more pressure, like, "Oh, man, I can't fuck this up."

And you see that people are loving Rue and that are invested in her journey, accepting of her frailties and foibles and wanting to keep going, and then you're desperate and afraid that she's going to relapse. And you want her to do what's right, but you also want her to be herself. When you see someone else talk about her as if she were a real person and a character that seems fully realized those little moments, I think you can be like, "I didn't fuck it up."

Shauna Foster:

Thank you, Julio.

Shannon Baker:

Yeah, just going off of that, tons of people thought that #blackAF was a documentary [crosstalk 01:03:18] they thought that those were his real kids.

When I was cutting it at first, I thought the baby was his real baby. I was like, "Oh, is that your baby?"

He was like, "No, that's an actor too." So something [crosstalk 01:03:32]-

Christine Armstrong:

So cute.

Shannon Baker:

... were like, "Oh my God, I hate him so much. He's such an asshole." And it's like, that's not a real personality.

Christine Armstrong:

Rashida Jones is not his wife.

Shannon Baker:

Yeah. It's not his real wife. [crosstalk 01:03:50] Twitter [crosstalk 01:03:53], people, but they do. They think that that was a real documentary of his life.

Shauna Foster:

Wow.

Christine Armstrong:

Well, it's just funny how I was just thinking that the other day, Shannon.

Shannon Baker:

They were very upset. They were very upset.

And especially in the clip that you showed where the daughter calls him a dick, people are like, "Oh my God, how could he let his daughter call him that?" It's like, it's a television show. They wrote it.

Shauna Foster:

It taps into where we started because I believe I read that Kenya gets his own kids to read the scripts, and there's an article where he talks about getting his older kids to read, and they have to kind of be on board with it. And again, all that whole notion of, this is personal.

And we see it. We love it. It's so there that we think what we're watching is his real family.

Christine Armstrong:

Yeah. Write what you know.

Shauna Foster:

Write what you know. Exactly.

Julio C. Perez:

That's right.

Shauna Foster:

Let's play this clip from episode 10.

[clip plays]

Shauna Foster:

I'm going to read a quote, and let's start there. So Michaela gave an interview to GQ last year, and I'm going to read.

I wish Michaela was reading this quote, and this is what Michaela said. "I need to big up my editors. They're brilliant, particularly Christian Sandino-Taylor, who did episode 10.

"He's the controller of that episode. He got my script, chopped it up, threw parts of it in the bin, dragged some stuff, fucked the whole thing, and created something far better than I could have ever made."

Christian, how? How?

And [crosstalk 01:07:44] dig into this next question, but we'll start with you, Christian. How did you find points where the audience can just absorb the content, and can you talk to a little bit about leading the audience versus just giving us the answers here?

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

I suppose in general, on that show, that actually is probably not a great example of this because that, we do use. We do play on the emotions very strongly.

But I suppose in general on the show, it was about trying to balance truths. So it's difficult to explain what I did on that episode because I basically was given it and recut it, changed the shape of it, and, as Michaela said, fucked it up.

But I suppose that ending, that last scene, which was earlier on in the episode before, what I try to do is initially, it was an episode just about Arabella and her journey, and the lessons she learned at home, she applied to her life. And then it wasn't really working, so I realized you could make it about the family.

And what happens in that episode is the brother knows that the dad's a philanderer, and the mother's kept it secret, and Arabella is in awe of her father and ultimately finds out that that's not true.

So basically, I was able to build it so you shifted perspectives. And then at the end, I suppose, yeah, what you're saying, Shauna, is you allow that scene to play out largely in silence.

You're basically watching these people have a meal, but by now, you should know the full context of that scene is that Arabella has learned the truth of her father and can forgive him. The brother knows everything about the mother and how long she's suffered with her dad's philandering over the years.

So he's watching the mother, and then the mother is trying to keep the whole thing together and has just been told that her daughter was raped. So placed earlier on, that scene, it had the context but not the power, whereas by placing that scene there and playing it in that way, you allow all the emotions to reach this crescendo and all the ideas, which are conflicting, to become this sort of coherent whole.

But again, across the series, what you're trying to do is you're not just trying to build the story of Arabella and make you empathize with her. Michaela wants you to also question her and then also understand the effects her actions have on other people.

So I guess I can't remember the original question, but I suppose that's what you do. You just build in those conflicting ideas, and then you let the audience deal with it.

You make the decisions. Here's all the information you need.

She's feeling this. She's feeling this.

And it's not necessarily going to be a comfortable ending for you. There's lots of different questions going on here, and there's no closure often.

So here you go. I suppose in that way, we use emotion to give you an emotional closure, but it still should be complex and should incite a kind of level of debate about-

Shannon Baker:

I remember watching so many of the episodes and being like, "Oh, this could be the end," because you set up that we were not going to get the answers from the very top, from the very beginning. And I remember being so afraid that we would not find out, Michaela would not find out, who had done what he had done to her.

And I just remember because you just kept setting that up. There are no answers.

You're not going to get the answers in the show, and I just was so afraid, like, "Is this the last episode? Oh, okay. Okay. We have one more. Maybe I'll get..."

But it was very satisfying. It was satisfying in that the journey, you were just watching her go through this process.

And it was very real and very guttural, what was happening. So I was okay with that somehow.

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

Yeah, I mean, lots of people weren't. Lots of people weren't.

Julio, God forbid you ever do go on Twitter, but if you do, you'll see lots of people loved it. But lots of people were like-

Shannon Baker:

But it was so set up. It was so set up. You set up the kind of show we were going to get from the beginning, from the very beginning.

Christine Armstrong:

And sometimes in life, we don't get those answers. That's [crosstalk 01:12:23], right? So that's why I kind of like it. Yeah.

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

Yeah. Yeah, [crosstalk 01:12:24] Michaela and Sam, all of our creators have done amazing work, haven't they? We've been lucky to work with them.

Julio C. Perez:

Absolutely.

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

Snuck it in.

Julio C. Perez:

Absolutely.

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

[crosstalk 01:12:38].

Julio C. Perez:

Yes. [crosstalk 01:12:38].

Shauna Foster:

Unfortunately, we have run out of time, but we want to wrap with one last question for each of you to answer in one short sentence, and we'll end with this, okay? Why do you do this work as an editor? Let's start with Julio.

Julio C. Perez:

Damn, you had to start with me with that question.

Shauna Foster:

[inaudible 01:13:09].

Julio C. Perez:

To discover and explore. I'll keep it simple.

Shauna Foster:

Christine.

Christine Armstrong:

I think to be a storyteller and help others tell stories and to get their voices heard.

Julio C. Perez:

Yeah, that's great.

Shauna Foster:

Shannon.

Christine Armstrong:

Because people are complex, and I like pulling out those intricacies.

Julio C. Perez:

Yeah.

Shannon Baker:

Nice.

Shauna Foster:

Thank you. Christian.

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

A combination of all three. Honestly, I can't add anything.

And because it's really fun to do. Not always, but ultimately, it's quite fun [crosstalk 01:13:48].

Christine Armstrong:

There are un-fun parts, yes.

Julio C. Perez:

Oh, yeah.

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

Yeah.

Julio C. Perez:

Oh, yeah.

Shauna Foster:

That's another panel, the un-fun parts. Thank you all.

Thank you all. This has been an honor.

Christine Armstrong:

Thank you.

Shauna Foster:

Thank you to the CCE. I hope our audience enjoyed the conversation today.

Sending love and light. Everybody keep safe, and enjoy the rest of your day. Bye, everyone.

Christine Armstrong:

Great work, everybody.

Christian Sandino-Taylor:

You take care.

Julio C. Perez:

Honor and a privilege. [crosstalk 01:14:13].

Christine Armstrong:

Thank you.

Sarah Taylor:

Thanks so much for listening today, and a special thanks goes out to Jane MacRae and Alison Dowler.

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[Outro]

Speaker 32:

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