

Look The Part introduction and talk from Claire Fletcher and Tracey Corbin-Matchett in conversation with Liz Lea

LL: Okay. So Claire, thank you so much for joining us today. Yeah. Um, you are coming in from Spain, is that correct?

CF: Yeah, that's right. I'm just having a little break at the moment in Spain, so nice to see you all.

LL: Oh, excited. Nice

CF: To see you. Liz.

LL: Can you tell me, um, could you just tell me and everybody watching a little bit about your history as a filmmaker?

CF: Sure. I come from a documentary background, so I've been making documentaries for a long time, um, both as a producer and an editor. And so I've been working with, um, uh, minority groups for a long time, but not so much with, um, disabled people with other groups collaborating on documentary, uh, films so that, um, you know, stories that we don't often hear get told, [00:01:00] and people who have little access to telling their stories, um, have a voice and an interesting way to, uh, be heard to a larger audience. So I'm very familiar with that world of collaborating and empowering people to, um, come forward with their narratives. But this was the first time that I decided to, uh, step into a kind of more fantasy fiction dance world, which felt like it fit really well with the students and what they were trying to say.

CF: Some of their favorite movies were dance movies, fantasy movies, um, magical mu movies. So when we started collaborating and I started doing the workshops, uh, with the bus stop students, I, um, I felt that that would be a nice genre to explore, [00:02:00] um, because it really excited them. Um, although it wasn't, it, it was a genre that I love, but it wasn't a genre that I was very familiar with. So, um, for me it was a good way to marry my skills as a collaborative filmmaker with, um, bringing in other people who had those kind of dance, that kind of dance background, and then the students', interests and skills and passions as well.

LL: Okay, fantastic.

CF: Dunno if I answered the question. I went on a bit of a tangent there.

LL: It's, it's really good because it just gives you a, um, a bit of a background and a history and a segue into the history. So can you tell us about this beautiful film?

CF: Yeah, sure. So, the film, um, the film came about, the way that bus stop works is very collaborative. So you, you do a class with the students over a year, and over that year you kind of develop, discuss, workshop, improvise, um, and then you shoot and edit the film. Um, in our case it was right at the end of the year because of Covid, but usually it's about the middle of the year or the second half of the year that you do the shoot. So what happened with me is, I, I had some, some background with, [00:03:30] um, disabled filmmakers before, but not so much this particular group of, young, intellectually disabled filmmakers. So it took us quite a while of just being playful in class and me getting to know the students and then getting to know me and building that trust and building that dialogue.

CF: And in that time we collaborated, we did a lot of film history, we looked at various films and really was just a question of getting to know each other and me getting to know the strengths of the students and which ones had already made films and what they loved. And out of those workshops, out of that collaboration, it became clear to me quite quickly that dance was something that I could tap into, we could tap into. Um, we often did dancing to just kind of loosen up in the classes, or we watched dance films, we watched a Hollywood musicals. So that's where the seed of the idea came from. And also when we were doing these kind of loosening up things in class, I realized that a lot of the students were excellent dancers and really passionate dancers. And some of them had had lessons and some of them were gymnasts.

CF: And I was like, wow, I have this really talented group of like dancers and um, you know, why don't we tap into that and why don't we do something with that, that that passion. Um, I'm not a dancer, but I love dance and I love, I love kind of watching, I love it as an art form. So once we kind of, once I kind of realized we were gonna do something with dance, then we started talking about the story and oh God, it really just came out of fun activities that we did in class and improvisation this story about this kind of magical drag queen, uh, fairy godmother. And you know, I think what I realized is a lot of the students feel that, you know, they're not always the first in line to be the leader role. They're not always given those opportunities.

CF: So I guess it became this kind of metaphor in terms of, you know, this unrecognized talent that's out, that's all around us and, um, how to tap into that and how, and, and why do we do that? Why do we not, you know? And so the Cinderella story of the kind of transformation kind of felt a very natural way to, to tell that story. And also because magic was something that kept coming up in class, magical fantasy. Um, you know, that was something that sort of naturally

came through the script because it was something that really interested the students. Um, in terms of the actual logistics, like Tracy can talk a little bit more about this, but some of the students had already done the course three or four times and made different films and they were quite familiar with what to do with cameras or what to how it all works.

CF: Others were completely fresh and this was the first time they'd done the course. So it was a question of kind of balancing out roles so that the ones that were more, because everybody had a role in the film, [even if they weren't an actress, they all had a role, so, or actor I should say. So what we did was we cast first, we did auditions and we cast and that casting was not just my class, but it's open to the whole of bus stop, although the lead was in my class. But some of the other actors in the film were from different bus stop classes. And then we did a kind of, um, allocation of roles, but trying to get people into roles that they were interested in. So if you were interested in sound, you would shadow the sound recordist and you would even, you know, help the sound recorders.

CF: If you're interested in camera, you would go on the camera team. If you were interested in costume, you would help the costume designer and assist the costume designer. And then onset, it really depended how confident each student was in that role. Some of them had already assisted camera before, some of them had already been an assistant director of some of them already been a director before. So they kind of slot into where they were comfortable and the ones with less experience were more kind of, um, shadowing and the ones with more experience were more familiar with how, how things run, I guess you would say. So then it, it gave everybody in the, in the class a chance to either be a performer or be a part of the crew.

LL: Fantastic. And and I say this because I direct the Chamaeleon Collective and we've been doing a lot of dance films. Melanie Lane has made a beautiful film called Dance Del. And as part of that process, Justin who has spoken today, or who will be speaking today, he was one of the cameramen and he's making a series of documentary films. So I, so it's, it's great to hear that process and the time and the interest, the way it's kind of opened up to people and their genuine different interests, um, and then building different skills at the time. So how long, as the film is four minutes long, is that right?

CF: Yeah, um, I think five with credits, but yeah, something between [00:09:00] four and five with the credits. Yeah. And how long was the shoot? The shoot was one day. Okay. So that's, that's the bus stop model. So you, you write and you build and you think and you plan and you shoot in one day. And that's, I think that's partly a budget thing, but it's also partly about keeping the idea contained into something that's doable in one day so that it doesn't blow out into a 15 minute film and it doesn't blow out into this extravaganza. Having said that, it was quite

ambitious to do this in one day and we really had to work quite hard and um, plan a lot to, because as you know, shooting a dance film is not simple in that you have to have multiple angles to cut and uh, the way we did it was the students knew that dance so well by the time we shot that I could just click my fingers and they would go into the dance and we had three cameras on them, so we only did the dance live something like three or four times.

CF: But they got it right pretty much every time. Yeah. Um, I also had an amazing choreographer, um, Rena Renata Commisso who was on set with me and who worked really hard with the students over Covid, over Zoom Yeah. For four months to, create that dance with them as she had to create a dance that suited the personality of the students, but not only create the dance and practice the dance, I think we only had one live rehearsal, maybe two in a park with masks. And everything else was put together over Zoom, uh, with the, with the cues of the music. Yeah, for months because I knew that shooting one thing that people told me and that I knew from previous, cause I've done film clips and stuff as an editor and I knew that capturing dance is quite complex.

CF: So I knew from the start we were gonna have to have a very choreographed tight piece that everybody knew where to stand and knew what to do. So that when the camera roll they all just went into it. And Ellen was incredible, like, she's such an incredible dancer and she's also such a hard worker to um, you know, she was practicing in her own time in her bedroom for months and this is the, so she felt [00:11:30] com that's the lead. Yeah, yeah, that's the lead, Ellen, Ellen Meher who plays Sam, she practiced and practice and practiced, um, that dance so that she was just so confident we didn't have, we didn't have to do any retakes. Um, and she loved it. She loved the moment of when we actually performed the dance, it was the end of the day of the shoot, everybody was sitting in the audience cheering. So it felt like a live capture or something. Um, and um, it was a really lovely moment when we actually shot, shot the dance and it was literally just putting the cameras in, putting them on tripods and pressing roll. Okay. Because the students were very confident with all the rehearsing of what they were doing.

LL: Okay, yeah, the joy of that moment really shines through in the film.

CF: Yeah, exactly. Because I mean the one thing was she was a little bit nervous, I realized on the day she, even though she knew the dance very well, she was a little bit nervous and she wasn't like smiling. And then I said to the assistant director, get everybody in the audience and start clapping and cheering along with the song cause we're gonna put it. And then she just totally came alive and she started responding to that. And you have to remember that this had been in Covid so we'd all been locked up in our, um, you know, we'd all been locked up and we, we weren't sure if we were ever gonna shoot this film cause it kept

getting delayed and delayed and delayed. So it was also like the first or second time that the students had even seen each other for six months because we'd all been in isolation. So it was powerful on a number of levels. It was powerful just, just f people coming together. But also just that feeling of a live show. Nobody had had that for like a year and we kind of felt, even though we were distancing, we had our masks on and everything, um, it felt like a very kind of communal, um, moment when they performed that dance on set.

LL: Okay, great. Um, and we're about to show the film, so that's very exciting. I wondered, can you just tell me how long the editing process was?

CF: Yeah, the editing was a lot longer. Um, that was partly because I was editing it, um, and juggling it with other projects and things that I had going on. But also because we shot a lot of footage, we had Multicam footage for the dance. So there was a, even though we only shot one day, we actually had quite a lot to work with. Yes, for sure. Um, and uh, I think we only shot Multicam for the dance or maybe one or two other things. I kind of was very tightly story about storyboarded the rest of the shoot. And we often only got one or two takes because we just had a lot to get through. But the dance scene took a while to get right. Um, and also because the script changed in the edit originally, the original script was that the fairy godmother was there at the end actually in a different role.

CF: Um, and it just, when I edited it like that, it didn't feel right. It didn't feel like it sort of took the moment away from Sam or Ellen in a way it took the moment away from her. So in, in the edit I'd sort of discovered it was better to keep the fairy godmother this sort of magical character that just kind of appears. Whereas in the original script there was sort of a double, um, what do you call it, double ganga scenario going on where the fairy godmother was also the lighting guy who appears at the beginning and then comes back at the end as the lighting guy and sort of changes, but when it just didn't feel genuine to the film. So that finding that new ending, um, took a little while, which often happens. I'm, I've been an editor for years, so I'm very aware that it can take a while to find the story in the edit. It doesn't always cut together as you expect it to cut together, I guess.

LL: And I think that's very true of dance when you're filming dance. Like even though you had maybe only three takes but you still had three cameras, that's nine cuts. But even within their different expressions and because the other reality is that there is the capacity there to edit the dance in such a way that it's quite fundamentally different from the piece of straight choreography. And you Yes. Not just looking at the dance, but within the dance of the whole film and Renata's work, there's, there's that kind of joy with it. The the editing within itself becomes a piece of choreography.

CF: It does. It does. And also even though they knew the moves completely, you know, completely, well as you know, every single take is a little bit different. Like the expression can be different or they can, one dancer can move their arm just in a way that blocks another dancer. Or nice accidents can happen in that, in those different takes so they don't all look the same. Yes. So then it was a question of where do I go into the closeups and where do I keep it wide [00:16:30] and what moment do I wanna see Ellen's face and what moment do I wanna see Ellen's feet? And all those little choices and those little rhythms that you create in the, in the edit affect the sort of momentum of the dance. So, um, luckily we were, we only had um, 30 seconds of dance, but it still, it still took a long time in the edit to get that 30 seconds Right <laugh>.

LL: Well look, it's a really beautiful film and we're so thrilled to be able to show it here at I Dance II. Uh, and then it is gonna be online for two weeks as well for people to be able to watch.

CF: Okay, great, great, great

LL: Captions and, and so forth. So I'm so grateful to you for your time, Claire coming in from Spain and on behalf of Matt, Hanna and myself and everybody watching, um, thank you.

CF: No worries. Good luck with the festival and um, I'll try and catch if I'm not there in person, I'll try and catch online some of the other films. I'm really excited to see them.

LL: Okay, great. We'll send you a link.

CF: Okay, great. Thanks Liz. See you. Bye.

LL: Hi Tracy and thank you so much for joining us. Thanks so much Lisa. Thanks for having me. Not at all. And congratulations on your recent award.

TCM: Thank you. Thank you very much.

LL: Is that work related?

TCM: Uh, I received my order of Australia for services to the disability [00:18:00] and the arts community. So it's kind of wrapped up in, in my work but also a reflection of my, some total of my career and my life I guess.

LL: Okay. Well congratulations. It's, thank you. It's fantastic and it's great I think when people are recognized for the work that they're doing.

TCM: Yeah, it was um, pretty exciting cause I was actually nominated by one of our students of bus stop films, um, from our Wollongong program, Ricky Gamble. And so it was very lovely cuz you don't know who nominated you and I only found out a couple of days before the announcement that it was actually him. So that was made it even more special.

LL: That's delightful. Well, congratulations again.

TCM: Thank you.

LL: We had a, I had a brilliant conversation with Claire yesterday coming in on her phone from Spain. I lived vicariously for a moment and she talked about the beautiful film look the part and we'll be showing that in just a moment. But I wondered if you could just briefly, as I know you're very busy, if you could just talk about some of the process of how you work in bus stop films, how you, um, engage with and employ people who live with disability and the creation of your filmmaking.

TCM: Wonderful. So, Look the Part is a really great example of that. So it was made through our accessible film studies program, uh, at AFTs. And the process, uh, to make our beautiful films is really collaborative. It is with the participants and the tutor who is the director working together to craft an idea which the, the participants come up with themselves. And sometimes it's a matter of having a vote <laugh> that you can't bring everyone's ideas into a film, but really exploring their creativity through the process of filmmaking. Um, and they bring that film to life. So they work on the production design and the sound design and the scripting and they work on the auditioning of the talent. And in that instance they worked on learning the dance routines as well, which is really lovely. We're a film school, not necessarily an acting school, but we do have a lot of talent amongst our cohort who not only great at filmmaking but are great at dancing and acting as well.

TCM: And you see that in look the part, I think most of what you'll see on screen is a lot of our students plus the amazing, Peaches, drag queen who is just exceptional. Um, part of our process through the accessible film studies program as well is when we're bringing the projects to life, the participants work with professional filmmakers in a mentor-mentee relationship. So on the production onset they work, um, sort of half a day each across a role that they would like to do or an area that they're keen to learn more about. And they're partnered with professional filmmakers and there's that great knowledge share. You know, this is an industry, it's based on relationships and getting to know and the sharing of my knowledge to you. And it's how we craft those relationships and how beautiful creativity blossomed. And you'll, you'll see that in Look the Part.

TCM: And an extension of that is how we then work with the industry to build confidence in film, tv, commercial production to employ people with disability and also open those pathways for our participants to gain work, um, in professional production. So that's really lovely to see that happening. Um, and primarily we're placing people into crew roles below the line crew roles from our production, but we're really also seeing support for people that working on the production on onscreen the onscreen talent as well. And look, the part has been so widely and so well received at festivals around [00:21:30] the world and across Australia in, um, you know, the lead talent. Ellen traveled with us over to Fest Oz and she presented the film on an industry panel alongside other filmmakers. And that's a really, um, beautiful part of our program and our process as well is that the students and the participants are involved in the production of the film from the genesis of an idea through its development, through the production, through to walking the red carpet and being on the industry panel at, at the screening. And that's that full circle moment for a creative.

LL: Yeah.

TCM: When you make a film, you walk the red carpet, you introduce your film, you're part of the, the, the, the industry. And for us as well that visibility of having a, an amazing young talent filmmaker who also happens to live with Down syndrome, walking that red carpet in that media wall and, and introducing the film. So that's, that's how we approach inclusive filmmaking. It is an end-to-end process. Um, and we have a quite a flat structure. Filmmaking is generally quite hierarchical. We try and flatten that. It's not anarchy and there's always someone running the ship, but it's quite collaborative and we bring the students on board that journey as well.

LL: It, it's just fantastic. It's such a beautiful film and I'm so excited that everybody's gonna see it in a few moments and thank you for enabling us to also share it with people online for two weeks. I, it's, it's so important. We've got such a beautiful suite of films from around the world, uh, and um, I'm just, I'm just so grateful and I'm the only one here. And then there's Matt and Hanna, my other two really extraordinary directors. Thank you for all the work that you're doing. Thank you for making this possible, for joining me today for congrats on your OAM and um, thank you. Yeah, I look forward to being in contact with you again further.

TCM: For sure. Thank you so much for having me and I'm sure everyone will love the film. Like you, you watch look the part and your face will ache from smiling because it is just such a like, oh that just made me so happy watching that. It is such a [00:23:30] joy.

LL: I think we all need a little bit of face ache right now.



TCM: Yeah, yeah, you do

LL: Alright. Thank you so much.

TCM: Thanks so much Liz. Enjoy it. And, and good luck with the, the conference and I'm sure it'll be wonderful and everyone will, well Look the Part.

LL: Thank you so much. Okay, bye. Bye.