

[Scene from the film 'CODA']

FADE IN:

INT. Home of Ruby's teacher Bernardo Villanova (aka 'MR. V) -- MORNING

MR V sits at his piano in a large light filled room, accompanying Ruby Rossi as she sings 'Both Sides Now' by Joni Mitchell.

RUBY

 They shake their heads, they say I've changed.

BERNARDO VILLALOBOS:

Breathe.

RUBY

 Well something's lost but something's gained.

BERNARDO

Breathe!

RUBY

 In living every day.

BERNARDO

Exasperatedly

No, let it out, let it out. Don't hold it. Don't hold it! Ruby, no. If you're going to pick Joni Mitchell, you're going to *sing* it. This is one of the great songs.

RUBY

Walks dejectedly away from Bernardo

Yeah, I know.

BERNARDO

You either find a way to connect to it, or pick a different song.

Bernardo suddenly claps theatrically and walks to Ruby, shakes his arms back and forth and asks her to do it too, she follows reluctantly

Okay, come on. Shake your body. Shake it. Shake your arms.

Now, sing back at me.  Me, me, me, me...

Come on.

RUBY

Sings meekly

 Me, me, me, me.

BERNARDO

No, no you are holding it.

RUBY

I'm not.

BERNARDO

Yeah, you're trying to sound pretty.

RUBY

I'm not.

BERNARDO

Yes, you are.

Both Ruby and Bernardo are frustrated with each other

BERNARDO

Okay. You said when you started school you talked funny.

Funny how?

RUBY

(Dismissively)

I talked like a deaf person.

BERNARDO

What does a deaf person sound like?

RUBY

You know.

BERNARDO

No, no, I don't know. I want you to tell me.

RUBY

Different.

BERNARDO

Different *how!*?

RUBY

Like, wrong. Ugly.

BERNARDO

Puts his hands on hips and challenges Ruby

Ugly? .. Okay. Make an ugly sound for me.

RUBY

What?

BERNARDO

Come on. Yeah. You think you were the only kid whoever got bullied? Whoever had a funny accent?

Bernardo faces Ruby and he gets her to extend her arms out. They lock hands, fingers intertwined,

BERNARDO

Look in my eyes. Push back in my hands as hard as you can. Push, push. Look at me. Make the ugliest, grossest sound you can. Come on!

Ruby growls at Bernardo like an animal and he growls back they exchange several growls and raws but Ruby's heart is not really in it, she looks embarrassed.

BERNARDO

Go! Be a monster!

Suddenly Ruby reaches down inside herself and lets loose a full throated passionate raw directly into Bernardo's face.

BERNARDO

Now, sing at me !

RUBY

Ruby sings straight back at him with passion and a blaze in her eyes

 I've looked at life from both sides now. From win
and lose and still somehow.

BERNARDO

Claps his hands enthusiastically

Yes! That's it! That's *it*. That's what I was waiting
for.

Bernardo high fives a still stunned Ruby who then smiles and shakes her head

END SCENE:

Lisa Zambetti: Hello! Welcome to Killer Casting. This is Lisa Zambetti, I'm probably best known as the Casting Director for CBS' "Criminal Minds" and co-casting director for the FX series the pilot for "Reservation Dogs", which I'm so, so proud of. And it seems to be doing really great on Hulu. I hope you're all watching it. But today is an example of exactly why I started this podcast.

It's because when I see a project like the film we're going to discuss today, one that fills me with such joy that has such an incomparable and indelible cast. I absolutely need to talk about it. I need to shout it out to the world and really not just praise it, but break it down. Why is it praiseworthy? What are the elements that make it (for me) as a Casting Director, as a former actor, as a director, as a writer ... what makes the film in question so exceptional?

And of course, I'm talking about the film CODA, written and directed by Sian Heder which is playing now on Apple TV Plus. It stars Marlee Matlin, Troy Kotsur, Emilia Jones, Daniel Durant, and Eugenio Derbez and boy, does it pay respect to each and every character in the film. Anyway, I don't want to talk about it by myself. I've got to chew it over with bigger and better minds in my own. So please say hello to my beautiful co-host the Thunder From Down Under, Dean Laffan. Hi, Dean.

Dean Laffan: Hi Lisa, good to see you, good to chat and discuss this unusual (for me), film.

Lisa Zambetti: For this particular movie, because it's so special. I'm probably going to start crying because it's just really moved me so much. I'm very protective of it. And I simply can't explain why it just moved me on so many levels. Anyway, I wanted to have on, an actor that I cast many, many years ago. She is an amazing actress, producer and a writer. She's also part of the deaf community and her name is Antoinette Abbamonte.

Antoinette, thank you so much for joining us. I was saying earlier you have not aged a day since I cast you in 2012. On a TV show called "The New Normal". It's so good to see you!

Antoinette Abbamonte: Oh, thank you, Lisa. Thank you.

Lisa Zambetti: And I should say that you and I are able to hear Antoinette's thoughts today because we're using an interpreter, the wonderful Nicole Pancino. Thank you for joining us, Nicole.

Antoinette, how are you?

Antoinette Abbamonte: I am doing great. I am enjoying life. I'm working now with some writers to make sure that the Deaf culture is properly representative and that we have really good strong leading characters and it's been so fun. And the important thing for me is I have to have fun doing it because that's how I know I'm going to continue doing something. That is just my thing and being creative and just pulling out whatever ideas I can, I've done that since I was a little girl. I just always love coming up with

ideas, anything ... Sci-Fi ... I've enjoyed all of it. And that's what we're working on now. It's a Sci-Fi project.

Lisa Zambetti: Oh cool. So I should tell our listeners and our viewers who are watching this because we're going to post this on YouTube. The Deaf community is not a monolith. There are people for whom, when Antoinette says proper representation, what that means to her could mean something completely different to other people in the community.

I don't know what she thought about CODA at all, I know that there are people who are championing it. And there are parts of the deaf community who aren't. And I've heard a couple of criticisms that stab me in the heart, but that's okay. But I just want to get from both you and Dean, your immediate hits off of it.

But I do want to break it down. What we do Antoinette is we really break down the movie, like we literally will go scene-to-scene to really dig in and analyze something and not just make assumptions. Because some of the criticisms I've heard, well I went back and rewatched the movie, and none of the things that they're talking about are *actually in* the movie. It's almost like those criticisms are assumptions that they've made about the movie, which is interesting. But anyway, tell me, what do you think of CODA?

Antoinette Abbamonte: Well, first, the word that comes to me is "wow". And I really applaud the people who are working on that (film). The actors that they hired were deaf. So *finally*, we're having that kind of representation.

It took (until) 2021 for that to happen. We need to be able to come in the door and watching the story, there are some deaf family stories that I can see are common in the world. So I think we should be able to see these authentic stories. I think that is by far the most important thing to get those deaf actors in, and (then) they're really doing the work. I can't say enough good things about them. Marlee Matlin, Troy Kotsur, Daniel Durant all did a fantastic job. And I completely support the work all of them did.

Lisa Zambetti: Oh, I'm so happy to hear that! I have so much to say, what you just said has just sparked so many ideas. Dean now, what did you think?

Dean Laffan: Well, when you first mentioned this film, and I looked at the trailer, and I'm thinking oh okay, a 'feel good movie'. It's got elements of this and that (in that genre) . I (usually) tend towards the darker side of things with films, for instance, possibly my most hated film of all time, is Forrest Gump.

Lisa Zambetti: I don't think you're alone there ...

Dean Laffan: I can't stand how manipulative it tries to be! I can't stand that it celebrates this kind of. ... I'm probably going to use the wrong word, but I don't mean it maybe the way it comes out. But just the sort of celebration of 'mediocrity' or the idea that, oh anyone can do anything if you just keep running (Forrest!), if you just do *this*, life will be fine, and it all works out. Forest Gump asks you to participate in that kind of bullshit. That's how I feel about *that* movie.

So I'm looking at CODA thinking, 'Oh here we go ...' So what is my reaction to this film .. ? well like you, Lisa, I'm still choked up. This is an *incredible* film. I have not been moved by a film like this since .. I can't even remember when. And I have a little bit of tears in my eyes now just thinking about it. And I don't cry in films! I'm an Aussie bloke, we don't do that. But I'm sitting, watching this film. (And I knew from the trailer), I've even mentioned to you before, a week ago, I said, Oh my god, there's one scene in the trailer, I think this film is going to hit me. And I did tear up. And I choked up at a couple of other points in the film. And then there was one point in the film where I completely and utterly lost my shit, and I had tears streaming down my face. I can't remember the last time I felt hot tears on my face watching a film.

It is the most beautiful, beautiful film. And what I love about it is that it is so incredibly *true*. And I don't mean that it's a documentary. You know what I mean ... What I mean is that it is full of *truth*, (as far as I understand it). Well the performances are anyway, I can't speak to any experience of being deaf. But it's authentic, (it feels authentic), and it's just incredibly moving. So I was simply so happy to see this film. Very, very happy.

Lisa Zambetti: Yeah. And when you say it strikes you as true, I mean for me, obviously, I'm not deaf, but I am a mom. And I do have teenagers who are about to go out into the world. I understand what it's like for a family to struggle. I understand what it's like to feel isolated or just feel ... I mean

... there's so many things that just hit me watching it. And Antoinette I want you to talk about who Troy Kotsur is to the acting community. And I should say, (and I wish Jim Clemente were here), we cast Troy on Criminal Minds as a serial killer the year before I started on Criminal Minds. And would you believe I only found that out today. Troy came in for the same series that I cast you on. Okay, he came in for a role ... I think it was to play your husband and that's the first time I met him but I've seen him so many times. Talk about who he is, and why we are cheering the fact that so many more people in the world will now know of his genius.

Antoinette Abbamonte: His use of sign language is out of this world. He puts so much in, and he loves to really become whatever character he's portraying. He'll take risks, which I appreciate in his work. I think that is absolutely astounding. And in CODA, there was so much color there.

Lisa Zambetti: Yeah, well, we swear all the time on this show. And so I really appreciated his just poetic use of profanity and dirtiness. I just fucking loved it. I mean, he just went there. Antoinette, the things that he signed, are they in the ASL or is he improvising? Is he making things up .. I'm just so ignorant about it. What do you have to say about that?

Antoinette Abbamonte: Well, from my understanding for this film, you could do some improvisation, you don't have to have the script exactly in mind. But having not looked at the script, I'm not sure how much of it was just kind of, him going his own direction. For me, the way he expressed himself in sign language? ... I'm not sure if we would do that, in real life with our

deaf family to talk to our own daughters, (as he did) with his daughter, I mean, to me it felt a little too much. But he may have made the choice to do that to really have as much fun as possible. And I'm not sure what his intentions were about the way he performed it though ...

Lisa Zambetti: Yeah. Well, I mean, I don't know is there really a sign for 'twat waffle'? (Laughs) Or, you know, any of those very colorful words that the brother and sister have for each other. I just thought that was so great.

Antoinette Abbamonte: Well, I was just going to say, teenagers, high school aged, people who go to schools of the deaf, yeah, you're probably going to see that kind of dirty sign language going on, that kind of graphic (signing) it's a sign language, because it's very evocative of what it looks like. And so you'll see that a lot for deaf teenagers. I don't know that you'd see that kind of language used in home environments. We're talking about siblings here. I came from a deaf family. My parents are deaf, my brother is deaf. We certainly never did anything along those lines. We don't have those kinds of discussions about sex in my life *at all*. That was not part of what we did. My parents moved in from another country so I don't know if that possibly influenced it. Maybe here in the United States, deaf families would be that way. That just wasn't what it was for mine, so I can't speak to others.

Lisa Zambetti: I wanted to mention to people who haven't seen the movie yet, can you just define what does CODA mean? In terms of this movie, Antoinette?

Antoinette Abbamonte: Oh, sure. CODA (Child Of Deaf Adult). So a child who has Deaf parents. There's also a CODA spelled KODA (Kid Of Deaf Adults), that's for a young kid of deaf adults. And in a way I'm a CODA too, who just happened to be deaf because I am a child who had Deaf parents.

Lisa Zambetti: That's right.

Antoinette Abbamonte: And I very much supported my parents, especially my mom, because as I mentioned earlier, she moved from another country with a different language, a different *sign language*, so she had to learn ASL from my dad. My father moved here when he was 10, and went to a residential school for deaf students so he learned ASL, but when my mom moved here, she was 22. So she didn't know American Sign Language. She had to learn that after she got here, so I remember I had to help her out with reading English because she wasn't comfortable with reading English. And we used to have this old 'teletypewriter' they were called, to make phone calls typewritten out into written language. So I had to help my mom make her phone calls. And she eventually had to go and learn English in school. So that was my experience. So I can see a little bit of that experience for me, from what I saw in the film.

Dean Laffan: The other thing as well Lisa in terms of the film is that CODA, (as we know, from Francis Ford Coppola's film 'CODA: The Death of Michael Corleone') that CODA in musical terms, is a passage that brings the particular piece of music to an end, which, of course, is what the film is kind of about.

Lisa Zambetti: Right. So if you haven't seen the film, it is about this family of four where it happens to be, that three of the members (Mom Dad and the eldest brother) are deaf, and the youngest child (Ruby) is not and it's a movie where we really get a snapshot of what their life is like, being these fishermen in Gloucester and how Ruby's got to help her family. She's grown to help her family, but clearly they had the ability to make this business run long before she was born. So it's not like they're *helpless* and they can't survive without her. But I think as in many farming families or fishing families, the children become enveloped in the parents work. And it's just the sort of seamless thing that you *do* the family business. And now this is the time for her to figure out how to break out of that, *is* she going to break out of it? And it's just an amazing story in that way that I think so many families can relate to whether you're in the hearing community or not.

Dean Laffan: By the way, Lisa, how much are we going to plot spoil here?

Lisa Zambetti: Oh, the whole thing.

Dean Laffan: Everything? Okay. So warning, folks.

Lisa Zambetti: I want people to love the film.

Dean Laffan: If this sounds interesting to you turn the podcast off now. **(Or stop reading this transcript)** Go and watch the film, and then come back and listen to the rest of the podcast. Because it is hard to talk about the film

and give it the love which it deserves without spoiling the plot. So please, press Pause. Come back and pick us up where you left off.

Lisa Zambetti: But one of the things that makes Troy so believable is that he has that sort of weathered, wizened face of someone who has spent their whole life on the sea. And the way he uses his body ... he's got these great bandy, bow legs when he walks around and his body is just so relaxed and settled into itself. I just loved that. And his emotion as he's struggling to figure out how to keep his business literally afloat. Should he push his daughter to leave and go to college? But it's so much easier to have her stay and he is trying to understand what it means for her to sing. Because it seems her singing is something that just comes out of the blue. What did you think of that plot Antoinette and Dean, how suddenly this daughter who apparently has been singing even though music was not really a part of her, the way it is in other singers lives.

Antoinette Abbamonte: Speaking for myself, I have my son here with me. In fact, he's 20 now. When he was much younger, I'd say maybe when he was 5,6 or 7 years old ? I worked so hard to encourage him to go out and take music classes, to take drumming, guitar, you name it, and he kept saying he didn't want to, but I'm the one who kept pushing him to go do that. I would *take* him there myself, even as a deaf person, because I wanted to see my child *really* have a full experience of his world. Because I feel that if I want people to respect me and *my* deaf world, it's important for me to respect him and the hearing world, so it's a two way street. I've very much believed it was important to encourage any child who's hearing to go out and experience

the world. Eventually, my son became a composer for guitar. He absolutely adores guitar, and he's so into that, I've got more pictures of him playing the guitar than I can tell you. So I'm happy that he got to that point, it made me feel so good to see my child have that kind of success. That made me feel really great.

So when I was watching this film, I just kept saying, this is just not how it was in my family. And I don't have my children interpret for me, if I go to the store or anything along those lines. When they were really young, I remember clear as day, that there was some sort of comments where I was like, you just you can't do that to children. You can't make your children someone you have to rely on to interpret for you. Because then you start manipulating them, and (then) they don't have their own lives for themselves. And I did not want that to happen for my kids. So I made a very conscious effort.

And there was a lot of times that I'd be in a store and the store owner would say, "Oh could your little kids just interpret for me?" And I would say no, let's you and I figure this out, we'll use gestures, we'll use written back and forth language, whatever we have to do. I really wanted to have that directly without having to bring my kids into it. On rare occasions, if the kids saw that I missed something, they might interpret something for me. And I would always appreciate it. But I made sure that was as rare as possible, because I wanted them to have their own healthy, independent lives.

Lisa Zambetti: You say that your son plays the guitar, (and Dean maybe this is the scene that really got you.) If you've watched your son play guitar, you can't hear but maybe you can feel it, you can feel the vibration on the instrument. But I just love this scene where the parents are watching this concert and they're not really emotionally affected by it because they can't hear it. And they're looking around and being very polite, but I just love the 'peek' into that world. I love that they took the sound out of the film at that time and you're seeing what they see, and you're hearing what they're (not hearing) ... they're not missing anything, they don't know that they're missing anything. And then later when Troy has his daughter sing, and he's feeling her voice, I mean, Dean, was that one of your tear jerking moments? Because for me, I fell apart.

Dean Laffan: Yeah, that was a beautiful scene. And just one of the things that makes this such great film is that because of the nature of what the story is about, so many scenes are totally unique to me as a [person with hearing. I hate people who say 'very unique' and I just said 'totally unique', but it *is*. It's totally unique because I haven't seen a film like this with deaf characters interacting with non-deaf characters, so many things suddenly struck me with a dawning Oh, yeah, oh, *that* is going to happen. This whole story is on the face of it, clichéd. Its written clichéd. The performances (could be) clichéd, you've got the kind of grumpy old dad, you've got the kind of kooky mom, you've got the eldest child Leo, the older brother of Ruby, who feels he should be the one in charge, but he can't be because .. well not 'can't be', but he is pushed aside a little bit, because

he's deaf and his sister is not. And you've got the inspirational music teacher ...

This is all set up for bullshit. But guess what? it just fucking works. It works its ass off. It's because of the casting and the performances, it's just so special. So yes, that particular scene where he's got his hands on her throat ... and I wondered Lisa ...(putting your Real Crime Profile hat on). There's a difference between him doing this (Dean indicates on camera with his hands) and a difference between him doing that (indicates again) in terms of acting. Did you notice that? That he used the back of his hands, not the front of his hands around her throat.

Lisa Zambetti: I didn't.

Dean Laffan: So it wasn't a 'choking' type of a gesture. He's got both hands against her throat and against her sort of larynx. But he hasn't got his palms closed, like he was choking her. He's using the backs of his fingers. And he's feeling the vibration, it's beautifully tender. As is the moment where she's freaked out about singing face to face to, what's his name... ?

Lisa Zambetti: Miles, his name is Miles.

Dean Laffan: Right, Miles. So they stand back to back. And I'm looking at them touching back to back and I'm thinking that's an oddly very intimate pose. You're touching backs, and you're touching bums. And you can feel each other's breath. It's just wonderful filmmaking. But no, the scene that

really ... I just fell to pieces over, was during the Joni Mitchell song at her audition for Berklee and she started ... here I go. (Dean's voice catches) She just started signing. And you can see in her mind she just thinks, "Fuck it. I'm just going to do it. I'm going to let out what I feel. And I'm going to show you, this is who I am." And I was just like "wow".

Lisa Zambetti: And include her parents in it. Right?

Dean Laffan: I KNOW! Yes. Exactly.

Lisa Zambetti: She sings to them ... for them. Oh, my God.

Dean Laffan: Bravo.

Antoinette Abbamonte: She was born knowing that language before she knew English.

Dean Laffan: Another scene that just broke me out of nowhere was after she comes back home and she said she wants to go to the music school. And they've just gotten the co-op off the ground. They're saying how can you leave and her parents say, we need you ... we need you to translate. Ruby replies, "I've been doing this my whole life and it's exhausting". And they're putting it (the responsibility) on her. But she just wants to do what she wants to do (follow her heart). And what incredible lines the characters have here and there that are just so moving and so affecting, I was blown away.

Antoinette Abbamonte: And I really wanted to see more of the mother daughter relationship. That's what I really was craving more of, because I felt like there was a real missed opportunity there. I so wanted to see the two of them really develop a connection. I missed not having that.

Lisa Zambetti: Well, you know, I rewatched it today. And Dean, I hear what you say about that there are a certain amount of cliché in it, but then I have to push back on that because they really turn those clichés around because the mom isn't really kooky. It's just interesting. She's vain, in some ways. And that's okay. Like a mom can be vain. She's sexy, in a very grounded and natural way. She's still hot for her husband, and she doesn't want to talk to those hearing bitches! ... and who blames her, you know what I mean? You understand she has a world that she has worked fucking hard for. She has got this family, she's got this business, and she loves her daughter, and (Antoinette, I re-watched it just before we came on).

There are some beautiful scenes where the mom says, when you were born, I hoped you were deaf. And when you weren't, I was afraid. I was so afraid. And also, she admits to her husband. It's not that we need her to survive to interpret for us, but she's our baby and she's leaving. That's really what the crux is, that my baby is leaving home. And the easiest way to keep her even if it's just subconsciously, is to say, we need you for the family. And I can just imagine lots and lots of families, working families who probably say the same thing sometimes to their kids who are going to go off to the big city. It's so scary to think of your baby in the big city. And Ruby even says "I've never done anything without my family". It's not only that the

family's never done anything without *her*, but *she's* never done anything without *them*.

And the music teacher I'd like to talk about him, Eugenio.

Antoinette Abbamonte: Oh, I love that character! I loved him. He's the best.

Lisa Zambetti: Yeah, as a drama teacher myself and having taught drama in college, teaching is really hard. Talk about exhausting.

Antoinette Abbamonte: I was just going to say "Mr.V" I was trying to remember his name .. "Mr. V"

Lisa Zambetti: Right Mr.V ... (Lisa rolls the 'r' big time)

"Berrrrrrrrrrnardo!" By the way he is a huge freaking star in Mexico.

Dean Laffan: Of all the actors in this film, *this* guy who I've never seen before, the first time we see him, the camera was on him, he's sitting at the piano. He hasn't even said anything. And already, I'm wondering, "*Who the hell is THIS guy?*" wow. And then within the first five seconds, as great as this cast is, (and the casting of Emilia is by the way superb) as is the rest of the cast, there's only one false note in the casting, and I'll cover that later ... but it's nothing major.

But him (the actor Eugenio Derbez) Once he opened his mouth, it was like the *wattage* of his performance was amazing. I'm sorry (to the rest of the cast)

but whenever he was on screen, he just glows at like twice or three times the luminance of anyone else in the scene. And when I looked him up, yeah, he is like the biggest megastar in Latin America. And because I'm thinking, well, he's coming out of nowhere ... no he hasn't Dean, you're just ignorant and he's actually a super star.

Lisa Zambetti: Yes, he has that confidence of somebody who's a star in another country.

Dean Laffan: Absolutely.

Lisa Zambetti: And this is the thing about when you're teaching for high school or for college, in the arts, you can give so much to students, and you're trying to set a bar for them, and you're working so hard for them. It's really exhausting. And what I loved about him is that he came in with sass and brass and this uncompromising behavior. He kind of says "This is the bar and if you can't take it? ... then fucking leave." But he wasn't cruel, this isn't (the movie) 'Whiplash', or anything like that. But he's like, look, if you're going to work, I will work too, but if you're not going to work, I'm not going to kill myself to *get* you there. And that's an important thing. Because in my experience, trying to get actors to where they need to be, it's just so hard, and you're giving everything you can to the student, and you're rooting for them, and you kind of start doing all the work for them. And I just felt like this movie pays a lot of *respect* to the art of teaching and when Ruby is pissed off at him. And she says, well, what did Berklee College ever do for you? ... you know what? Teaching doesn't

mean you're a failure at your craft. Teaching is fucking *hard*, to be a good teacher and get your students to where they need to be. It can break your heart, students can really break your heart.

[Scene from the film 'CODA']

FADE IN:

INT. WE ARE BACK IN THE HOME OF MR.VILLALOBOS -- AFTERNOON

MR V sits at his piano in the same airy music room of his house. Late afternoon sun slants through the large picture windows of his house. He plays a tender piece on the piano, he's introspective ... wistful. Ruby arrives and stands at the door of the room, leaning quietly against the door frame. She's out of view of Bernardo, he doesn't know she's there. She is waiting for the right time to announce her presence. She's late for practice (again) and she knows Bernardo will be upset.

RUBY

Is that yours?

Bernardo stops playing, takes a deep breath, sighs and gives Ruby a side glance before looking away.

RUBY

Sorry.

I want to do this.

Bernardo folds up his sheet music and walks past Ruby to his desk

BERNARDO

I don't think so.

Ruby walks to face Bernardo from the opposite side of his desk, both standing

RUBY

Are you serious?

BERNARDO

You have no discipline. You are late. You are unprepared. You wouldn't last two days at Berklee. Out ... Go!

RUBY

(Dismissively) It's not like that school of yours did *you* any good?

Bernardo sighs and shakes his head with a smile

BERNARDO

You have what? ... 17 years on this planet? You don't know shit. You want to know why I am a teacher? I'm *good* at this. But I can't do my job unless you do yours. And I *certainly* don't need a lesson in failure from someone who's too afraid to even try.

END SCENE:

Lisa Zambetti: I loved that respect to that character. What else Antoinette? Do you have anything to jump into?

Antoinette Abbamonte: I know for me, as a deaf actor, (an actor who happens to be deaf is a better way to say it.) People say you have to look at the actor first. But right now, I'm feeling like it's really starting to have an impact out there ... of deaf experience and what it is, and that it's okay to be a deaf person. And a lot of people haven't had the opportunity to see a whole lot of deaf people out there. We've historically been shunted to the side. But now we're starting to see some floodgates open up, and you're starting to see more and more deaf people out there. And it takes away a lot of that, wanting to hide behind things. And now we can start looking at the talent. Let's talk about their *talent*. The fact that they're deaf? We can discuss that later. But right *now* let's look at their talent. And I see it happening. I think it's going to happen. I would love to have it be (that its about) who I *am* first, I'm Antoinette and I'm a mom, and I'm a wife or a partner, whatever. I like to be seen that way first and not going. "Hey, look, it's the deaf person". I have many layers in me. I am multitude, it's now becoming much less than it was.

Lisa Zambetti: So here's what I want to say about casting for a couple of shows where yeah, it's great when a writer will write a part for a deaf character. And that's great because we want to have representation and tell those stories. But Rebecca Silverman and I, on *Criminal Minds*, we kept

wanting to just cast actors who happened to be deaf, no matter even if the role didn't call for it. And I have to say that we would talk to a Line Producer and lets suppose my idea was to have a deaf actor play a medical examiner, because I thought that was just be so cool. With no explanation. It's just why not? I'm sure that there are deaf doctors and deaf medical examiners, and that would be fine. And actually one of the series regulars on Criminal Minds, they have established that he did sign, and I thought there would probably need to be an interpreter. If there's a medical examiner talking to the FBI and telling them his or her findings about a murder victim, there would need to be an interpreter, and (the view from the Line Producers) was that the hiring of the interpreter was like, "Oh that would just be an extra expense. I don't think we can really do that". It was just easier to say no. But if it was a *written* as a deaf actor, there was no problem though, that the production would pay for the interpreter or do whatever else that needs to be done, but to actually say "Hey maybe we could have this be a wheelchair-using actor, this seems like a good situation. It's not they are going to be running across a field chasing after a bad guy. This is like a perfect situation for somebody who's on wheelchair". But it just seems that if it's not in the script, there's no green light to just bring in the actors. And I know that that is going to change. And hopefully, maybe a movie like CODA will help push it along. And you can see, yeah, someone can be a lobsterman or fisherman and be deaf, but you can be *anything* and be deaf. But it's hard because you don't want to fight against your producer, you want to do what's best for the show.

Antoinette Abbamonte: Yeah, and both of those characters, just like with both of my parents who were tailors they made clothes ... you just do your job, and you can be deaf at the same time if there is no limitations, so I couldn't agree more, we need to have more deaf people represented.

I am producing a film now in fact, called "Implant". And I'm working with Warren Zide, and the writer, Dwayne Alexander Smith, two of them very big in their field. And they had never worked with a deaf person before. This is their first experience in doing that. So with my company, we have an item in our budget for an interpreter, money already earmarked for me to meet with them. And that way we can talk about the money and investment and everything after that. But I want to make sure there's a line item in there for the interpreter, because that's important for me. And just a couple of weeks ago, I went with the writer, and I brought an interpreter with me. And you saw all these ideas sparking in the room. And you could see that the writer was really ready to put it in there. It was helpful. It was helpful for me to work with the writer in the room right there. It was amazing.

Lisa Zambetti: That is incredible.

Antoinette Abbamonte: That's why I wanted to create my company so I could produce these films that I want to see.

Lisa Zambetti: Yeah, exactly. And if you need a casting director ... Hi, I'm available.

Dean Laffan: I just want people to understand also that this film is sweet, and touching and uplifting. And as I said, not normally the sort of movie that I would go, wow, I want to see another one of these. But it's *just* so well done. But can I say, this thing is funny as all get out. It is *funny* all the time. It's not at the expense of anyone (usually). There was one scene where I just burst out into loud uproarious laughter. I was watching early in the morning down in the lounge room, and I think I must have woken people up .. It was the scene where there's the town meeting or if you will the 'fishermen's meeting' with the fish buyers who are underpaying the fishermen for their catch, and Ruby's father Franks has had enough. He uses his chair to stamp on the wooden floor and as he signs something. He tells Ruby to stand up. And I'm thinking oh, she's reticent to get up and translate for him. She's shy. Now, remember she has *just* come from the session with Bernardo where he gets her to do ugly sounds, and he finally gets to engage, let stuff out and find her voice (literally). And so in public she's been a bit of a shrinking violet up to this point. So when Frank signs she can tell her to say it, she looks up at the guy, the assholes that were the fish buyers (and these were the characters that I thought were just slightly cartoonish. Yeah they were the 'bad guys' and they were very one dimensional, but that's okay. I don't even care because the film is that good. And anyway, they are assholes). So she turns to them and emphatically says "Suck my dick!" And follows up with "Oh, by the way, that's from him, not me." Hilarious.

Lisa Zambetti: One of the other things I really admired about the movie is that although Ruby is bullied and made fun of throughout her high school

career and it must really suck. But then there's a moment where her love interest Miles says "You have the perfect life". And it's just struck me that is so true, that from the outside, everybody's life seems so put together. And he to her, he seems like the perfect guy who's got everything going for him. He's so popular, everybody likes him, and yet she doesn't realize, that to him, she's got this great family, fishing is such a cool job and he's seen her in town with her parents. You don't know what other people are thinking. I just thought that was such a great observation that we're so stuck in our insecurities.

Antoinette Abbamonte: That is so true. That happened to me in my life. I remember growing up and I went to school which was with all hearing kids. There was sometimes when I was in school with other deaf kids, but most of the time I was with other hearing kids and I would get bullied and mocked and teased, like you wouldn't believe. And it was really tough for me. And now I look at my son, and I see him getting teased (even as) a hearing person. So I'm like, "Oh, teasing just kind of happens and it's okay". People move on. It's not the end of the world or anything. I learned a lot from looking at my two kids. I'll tell you that.

Dean Laffan: Can I just say, Lisa, that the character of Ruby is so well cast and she plays a great arc within the movie. The actress Emilia Jones.

Lisa Zambetti: She's British.

Dean Laffan: Yes, she's British. Yes, exactly.

Lisa Zambetti: And she plays the daughter. Yeah.

Dean Laffan: And she has a certain character, even from the beginning, even though she was shy and unassuming. Nonetheless, for example when the fish buyers were giving her brother Leo too little money for their fish she stood up and pushed back against the prices . And it's a little old fashioned to use this term But, you know what she's got? She's got 'moxie'.

Lisa Zambetti: Moxie, yeah!

Dean Laffan: This kid has got Moxie .. I don't know how you translate that. Sorry, Nicole! But yeah, she's got gumption, she won't take shit from anyone, even though she's very quiet. And then, of course, she progresses throughout to have that characteristic and be strong. But it's there from the get-go anyway, and I just thought that she was a terrific character. And when you pushed back against me for saying that the movie was clichéd. And I was like, yeah, I know. But my point is it then *confounds* the clichés.

So here, you've got the classic story of the rich boy, poor girl. (It's often the other way around) And in the scene where she brings him to the house for the first time. It's a tracking shot and the camera picks them up walking in a long pan all the way top their home. She's apologizing for the house and he's saying no, it's great... it's fine. They did everything except cross a literal set of railroad tracks! He's from the wrong side of the tracks. He's the rich boy who's supposed to have the perfect life. But his parents don't talk to each other. They don't have sex. And then of course,

we get straight into that. Here's the comedy again right? So there's the scene with Frank and Jackie, the deaf parents having sex so loudly, they don't know that the kids can hear them. And then cut; Mom and Dad are sitting on the couch, like Oh my God, we got busted having sex. And she's telling them off, saying you can't do this. And it's like an inversion of the trope. She's the mom and that's the teenage kids that were having sex. That was hilarious! So then Frank does the whole scene about the condom thing. And she's just totally embarrassed and storms out of the house with Miles. And then they cut back to the parents on the couch. And they just burst out laughing. We understand then that he did it (The embarrassing condom miming scene) to get rid of her. It's just so well written.

Lisa Zambetti: That was so great. Yeah, Antoinette I loved that peek into the life of a family who is deaf, like the flicking on and off the light to wake somebody up, or just all the little nuances of what it is. If you're the hearing person in the family, and everybody's always making noise and banging pots and pans ... It was just great to see a peek into what that's like.

Antoinette Abbamonte: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. It was very authentic.

Lisa Zambetti: I don't know if you're aware of this, but this movie was based actually on a French film called "La Famille Bélier".

Antoinette Abbamonte: Yes, I had just learned that. And I haven't seen that original French film personally. So I can't really talk about how it compares. I was just going to ask if either of you seen that film?

Lisa Zambetti: I haven't. But I do know that Lionsgate bought the rights to redo the film. And there's a lot of controversy with that film because they did not use deaf actors. Now, that could never happen on network television, or any production company I've ever worked with. Because if it's supposed to be a deaf actor in this day and age, you *cannot* cast a hearing actor. My studio would never ever allow that to happen. If you couldn't find an actor to do the role, then you'd have to change the role instead of putting a hearing person in there.

But anyway, in the *La Famille Bélier* they had some hearing actors doing the role. So there's a lot of controversy and so when they went to make this version of it, there was some push to have fancier non-hearing actors play the role of the father and the brother and good for Marlee Matlin who said; "No, if you do this, I'm walking. I will leave this film". She's going to be the marquee, she's going to be what gets this greenlit, what gets it pushed forward. So good for her for fighting and also good for her for not making this a vanity production for herself. She doesn't try to shine herself brighter than anybody she's in the film with. Another actress might have tried to make the narrative more about her. She was just very generous.

Dean Laffan: Oh, yeah.

Lisa Zambetti: She was just very generous in the scenes she's in with other people, and letting other people shine, letting Troy get all the big teary moments. I thought that was just fantastic of her to do that.

Antoinette Abbamonte: We really should absolutely all support each other and for her in the deaf community and all of us. Yeah, we all have to be out there and supporting each other because once we start infighting, then we'll never really get anywhere. We have to really let go and just support everyone else for the betterment of all, for the success of all, so more actors can follow behind us. It is so critical.

Dean Laffan: I was thinking when we're talking before about children and deaf children and CODA, how we teach kids, (primary school kids even high school kids) we teach them French, we teach them Italian, would it really kill us to teach them some signing ? perhaps not learn the entire ASL but at least if you could learn to say the basics. Because I just realized I meant to look up how to say "thank you and goodbye" to Antoinette and I didn't have time. And I don't know, I think it's something like this. (Dean gestures) But I don't want to say anything rude ... we know that happened in the film! So especially for primary school kids to teach them to sign. Hello. Goodbye. Thank you. Just basic conversational stuff. I mean, you can travel through Europ, if you know about 20 words, surely we can all learn 20 words of ASL or whatever language is in your country. If someone's deaf, we wouldn't have to, write something down. If we could sign 'Hello' 'How are you?' 'I'm sorry'. I just realized that should be a thing. It shouldn't even be a thing. It should just be done. But it's not.

Antoinette Abbamonte: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's absolutely fantastic. Yeah, to have that exposure to different languages and not just ASL but spoken languages. It just the more you find out there, for both of my boys, they learned a lot. They learned some Spanish, they learned some French, (spoken of course). And they already had American Sign Language (ASL) from their home environment, but it just helps them to interact with other people. And it just is so much easier to develop a relationship and rapport with other people. I think that's critical for children to learn as many languages as possible, and really become comfortable with them.

Lisa Zambetti: I remember seeing a production of Children of a Lesser God, the play, which of course, is probably one of the most famous plays and movies about the deaf community.

Antoinette Abbamonte: (Cuts in) I have to say it! ... I don't like that play.

Lisa Zambetti: I know. I know ...

Antoinette Abbamonte: Yeah ... the 'deaf angry woman'.

Lisa Zambetti: I know ... I know. It's a product of its time, it was actually written specifically for the deaf actress Phyllis Frelich and it has a whole history of its own. But anyway, I was watching the play and I could see backstage that the stagehands had learned ASL, because it's so much easier to communicate backstage and actually on set even, because you have to be quiet, and so they could communicate soundlessly across backstage by using

ASL. So it's such a rich language for us to learn anyway. And certainly for actors. It's such a great physical experience in gesture and expression communication, I'm obsessed with that anyway.

Antoinette Abbamonte: Actors should learn ASL because it gives them movement to their body. I can't tell you how many times I've gone to see a play, like Shakespeare. And there are a lot of hearing actors that just stand there and the only thing that moves is their mouth. And they don't do anything else with their body. I'm like "Give us some movement here!" So I think that had these people had a chance to take ASL classes, they would learn how to be more comfortable in their body and move it. I think absolutely every actor out there, bar none should learn it.

Lisa Zambetti: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Dean Laffan: I just realized that what you were saying Lisa, about the stage hands learning ASL, that reminded me ... I have a background in cave diving and of course, you can't speak underwater. And particularly you can't speak in the dark. Cave diving is a fairly specific activity. So we only use a limited vocabulary things like, (Dean open and closes the fingers of one hand) I'm flashing my hands to make our sign for 'light' This sign (indicates) for 'Okay', A question mark is a crooked finger, to indicate a line tangle you you do this with your hands (Cosses middle finger over pointer and draws a figure 8 in the air), on YouTube you'll see I'm just making a knot sign with my fingers. We use one hand to count to 10 with 1 to 5 being with upright fingers then numbers 6 - 10 are represented by the same

fingers but now pointing sideways. Human beings have been doing this for a while. We just need to do more of it.

Lisa Zambetti: Well, I'm so happy to have had you here today Antoinette. It's so good to see you after so many years and to see you doing so well and to be able to share my absolute 'gushiness' about this movie. And also I just want to start this campaign, I am banging the drum ... an Oscar for Troy. I mean he 100% deserves an Oscar for this performance. I want to hashtag it everywhere and for all of his performances. By the way, I've seen him in a production of Deaf West's 'Big River', just before the pandemic. I was at this very random, private reading, where he and Deanne, (he's married to the beautiful actress who also happens to be deaf, Deanne Bray) and they were in this reading together. And I went up to him and I meant to say, 'Thank you', but I think I did something else. And he looked at me like; "What the fuck is she saying to me?" I think I went like this (*indicates*). I don't know what that means, but I meant to say 'thank you'. What does this mean .. Please? Does this mean please or love? (*indicates*).

Antoinette Abbamonte: It can mean please. Yeah.

Lisa Zambetti: No wonder he was confused. I was saying "please, can you please."

Antoinette Abbamonte: It could also mean "thank you"

Lisa Zambetti: Okay. Anyway, I've been a fan of his for decades. And it's about time that other people know of his brilliance. And everybody else in the cast was awesome, too. But he really is the touchstone in it. There's just nobody like him. And I just can't imagine another performance reaching, doing, what he did.

Antoinette Abbamonte: Yes, I couldn't agree more. We need more deaf males out there doing that for younger deaf boys to look up to and younger deaf men to look up to, because we really haven't had that representation. He's the one we have right now. Marlee Matlin, we have for younger women to look up to. But I'd love to see more diversity. I think that would be awesome for children and people like him, to look up to. And I love your idea about the Oscars push.

Lisa Zambetti: Absolutely. And I wanted to recommend some other places where you can see amazing actors who are deaf. There's a series called "The Society" which is amazing. Of course, there's a "Sound of Metal", there's "The Quiet Place", "One and Two", are there any others and "Switched at Birth". I know a lot of those actors who are in that show. Antoinette any other movies or anything you want to recommend?

Antoinette Abbamonte: Well, my film that is out now. It's called "Since August". I'm playing a lead character in that along with a hearing actor from Russia. And it's in film festivals, right now the Shanghai International Film Festival has it nominated. The whole movie is an ASL, there is almost no spoken language. It's also now being streamed in New York

at the Winter Awards Film Festival. They selected us to be screened, I think that's going to be happening soon. So I hope you both have an opportunity to see that. It's an excellent story.

Lisa Zambetti: Oh, I would love it. Actually I tried to see CODA at Sundance, but I couldn't get a ticket. But I would love to see "Since August" and encourage our listeners to go see it as well.

Antoinette Abbamonte: I loved to work with the hearing actress Sabina from Russia, I will send you the information so you can see it.

Lisa Zambetti: Awesome. Awesome. All right. Anything else Dean, you want to say before we say goodbye?

Dean Laffan: No, I think I'm old gushed out, that's way more emotion than I'm used to sharing. But it was such a beautiful film. I'm going to recommend it. I'm just going to post it everywhere. *Everyone* should see this film. It is just a beautiful film.

Lisa Zambetti: And I also want to thank Nicole Pancino, who's here. She's been interpreting for Antoinette. I know it is really exhausting for Nicole to be doing this. So I want to thank her very much.

Dean Laffan: Well done Nicole because you've now been going for an hour solid plus the show preamble. And I know from my other world, where I'm a live event Producer. When we have people signing on-stage for our love

events, they rotate out at 15 minute intervals. So you've done a *huge* job today. So *thank you* so much.

Nicole Pancino: You're welcome.

Lisa Zambetti: All right. Thank you so much. Take good care, everybody. And for now this is Killer Casting signing off.

Podcast Credits:

Killer Casting was created and produced by Lisa Zambetti. Sound Editing by Dean Laffan from Real World Productions. Logo art by April Laffan. Theme Music provided by Amphibious Zoo music. And big fat opinions provided by Brian Alan Hill.