

00:00:00	Music	Music	"Switchblade Comb," by Mobius VanChocStraw. A jaunty, jazzy tune reminiscent of the opening theme of a movie. Music continues at a lower volume as April introduces herself and her guest, and then it fades out.
00:00:08	April Wolfe	Host	<p>Welcome to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i>, where women get together to slice and dice our favorite action and genre films. I'm April Wolfe.</p> <p>Every week, I invite a new female filmmaker on—a writer, director, actor, or producer—and we talk in-depth about one of their fave genre films, maybe one that influenced their own work, and today I'm very excited to have producer, writer, director Mali Elfman with me. Hi!</p>
00:00:28	Mali Elfman	Guest	Hi, how are you?
00:00:29	April	Host	Pretty good! How are you?
00:00:30	Mali	Guest	I'm doing good!
00:00:32	April	Host	<p>For those of you not as familiar with her work, please let me give you an introduction. Mali is a BAFTA-nominated producer who began her career with her micro-budget anthology horror feature film <i>Do Not Disturb</i>, released by Warner Brothers in 2010. She both created and produced the film, and also penned one segment called "Maids Sequence." Since then she's traveled further and further into genre, making the anthology films <i>Fun Size Horror One</i> and <i>Two</i>, comprised of more than 45 short films.</p> <p>After that laborious project, she produced Mike Flanagan's <i>Before I Wake</i> before forging a more unique path in the genre world, partnering up with the likes of director Marianna Palka—who many of our listeners know for her <a href="#">Star Trek episode</a>—for her feature film <i>Bitch</i>. Then came another opportunity to work with a fledging female director, with Karen Gillan's debut <i>The Party's Just Beginning</i>.</p> <p>She recently produced the pilot <i>Neurotica</i>. with award-winning director Laura Moss and writer Nick Kocher from <i>SNL</i> and <i>It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia</i>. That film stars Karen Gillan and Jillian Bell. Mali also produced numerous live events, including Mark Danielewski's <i>The Fifty Year Sword</i> at the Disney Concert Hall, and the Overlook Film Festival's immersive game.</p> <p>She's directed four short films herself: <i>Voice</i>, <i>Loop</i>, and <i>Do You Believe in Ghosts</i>. She most recently directed <i>Locker Room Z</i> for the upcoming horror anthology <i>Fun Size Horror Shocktale Parties</i>, which is now on Amazon Prime. So people can watch it.</p>
00:01:54	Mali	Guest	Correct.
00:01:55	April	Host	Right now.
00:01:56	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	<p><b>Mali:</b> Yes. It's out there.</p> <p><b>April:</b> At this moment.</p>
00:01:57	Mali	Guest	Right now. You should be watching it!
00:01:59	April	Host	<i>[Laughs.]</i> And just finished in theaters at Alamo Drafthouse. Her goal is to ensure fair and enjoyable productions to help innovative storytellers bring monsters and mayhem to life. It's a pretty big goal, Mali!

00:02:13 Mali Guest *[Laughs.]* Yeah! You know. No big deal.

*[April laughs.]*

NBD. Yeah! No, I think one of the reasons why I always put that in there is 'cause it's—I like the crazy to be on screen and not off of screen.

00:02:23 April Host Mm-hm.

00:02:24 Mali Guest And I think that there's this kind of mythos that in order to create good work, everything has to be crazy and wild, and I'm like "No! The ideas need to be crazy and wild, and they need to be supported," and actually that can be a very fair, wonderful place to work.

00:02:36 April Host Aw! That's nice!

00:02:37 Mali Guest Yeah!

00:02:38 April Host So Mali, the movie that you chose to talk about today is *Another Earth*. Can you give us a little explanation on why this one's one of your fave genre films?

*[April responds affirmatively several times as Mali speaks.]*

00:02:47 Mali Guest You know, it's funny. I was—I knew you were gonna ask me this. Mainly 'cause we had already talked, and I was like—I knew this was gonna come up. And I was like "Why did I pick this film?" There's so many films that I was thinking of that are more horror or more sci-fi, but for some reason I've never been able to get this film out of my head since the moment I watched it. And I think the reason is, is because at its core is an emotional journey that is so pertinent to me, which is... In a—*[sighs]*.

With a slight change of something else, could I be a completely different person? Is there another me? Is there another way of that existing? And so I think that, you know, it's a beautiful movie, because it's got this sci-fi premise that just keeps kind of—it's in the distance. It's kind of in this background and it becomes more and more prevalent throughout the film. And yet at its core, it's really an emotional story that follows one woman, and I—you know, I always love a... emotional journey from a female's perspective that is relevant and timely with the sci-fi, you know, background.

00:03:40 April Host Yeah! And this is pretty much exactly that!

*[Mali laughs.]*

For those of you who haven't seen *Another Earth*, today's episode will give you some spoilers, but that shouldn't stop you from listening before you watch. My motto as always that it's... that it's not what happens but, uh, how it happens that makes a movie worth watching. I almost forgot what my motto is.

00:03:59 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Mali:** *[Laughing]* Yeah, what is your motto?

**April:** I say it every week, and yet I was like, "What do I think about things?" Still, if you wanna pause and watch *Another Earth*, please...

**Mali:** Nah—

**April:** Do—

**Mali:** Nah, no, no, you're good.

**April:** *[Laughs.]* Okay.

**Mali:** We—this is—this is all about how you get there.

**April:** *[Amused]* Alright.

**Mali:** Yeah.

00:04:12	Music	Music	"Another Earth Soundtrack - The First Time I Saw Jupiter; End Title" by Fall On Your Sword begins fading in.
00:04:13	April	Host	Now let's introduce <i>Another Earth</i> with a short synopsis. Written by Brit Marling and Mike Cahill and directed by Cahill for release in 2011, <i>Another Earth</i> stars Brit Marling as Rhoda, a little genius who gets accepted into MIT when she's 17.
00:04:27	Clip	Clip	<i>[Crowd chattering.]</i> <b>Rhoda Williams:</b> I was 17 when I got my acceptance letter to MIT. <b>Someone in Crowd:</b> 1, 2, 3, MIT! <i>[More cheerful chatter.]</i> <b>Rhoda:</b> I felt like... anything was possible. <i>[Rhoda switching to in-scene instead of voiceover]</i> <b>Rhoda:</b> I don't want to eat the apple of cynicism. <i>[Back to voiceover.]</i> <b>Rhoda:</b> And it was. <i>[Music stops.]</i>
00:04:44	April	Host	She gets drunk with her friends to celebrate, and then drives home while listening to a radio program discussing scientists' discovery of an Earth-like planet close enough to visit.
00:04:53	Clip	Clip	<b>DJ Flava:</b> Yo! I don't know if you heard the news, but the scientists say they just discovered another planet super close to us, with the conditions that could support <u>life</u> ? Really?! Well now it's visible up in the night sky! They say if you look just east of the North Star you'll see it!
00:05:10	April	Host	She gazes up into the stars and hits a car, killing a man's pregnant wife and young son and putting him into a coma. She then serves four years in prison for it, then takes a job as a janitor at her old high school. Meanwhile, the news of the other Earth—which is apparently a mirror of our Earth—is growing more and more urgent and interesting.
00:05:31	Clip	Clip	<b>Symposium Speaker:</b> This planet exists! It has mass! It has a clearly detectable orbit.
00:05:36	April	Host	She enters an essay contest sponsored by a billionaire who'll send

the winner to the other Earth. Rhoda finds the man whose life she ruined then. His name is John and he's a composer who quit-slash-lost his job, and who's cut off contact with the outside world in his grieving process. She poses as a maid, offering a free day of cleaning to gain access to John.

00:05:56 Clip

Clip

**John Burroughs:** Did you say trial cleaning?

*[Long pause.]*

**John:** Did you say trial cleaning? God!

**Rhoda:** Yeah! It's a ser—it's a—

**John:** Is it definitely free?

**Rhoda:** Yeah.

**John:** Alright. Let's go.

00:06:06 April

Host

And since he's lonely and quite unkempt now, heee says maybe come back next week, too. The two become closer and closer and eventually sleep together. Later, Rhoda wins that essay contest. John doesn't want her to go.

00:06:19 Clip

Clip

**John:** Please don't go. We're so close to something here.

00:06:23 April

Host

Rhoda decides it's time to come clean.

00:06:25 Clip

Clip

**Rhoda:** It was my fault.

*[Long pause. Soft noise like a clock ticking.]*

**Rhoda:** *[Whispering]* I killed your wife and your son.

00:06:35 April

Host

He's deservedly angry, and he tosses her out. Rhoda then hears about a quote-unquote "broken mirror" theory, which means that the moment the people on both of the Earths became aware of each other, their synchronicity may have broken. I.e., the other John's family may still be alive on Earth, and hey! You know, maybe Rhoda went to MIT after all!

She breaks into John's house to try to give him her ticket to the other Earth, but he tries to strangle her. And then his anger subsides and he stops, realizing what he's doing. She leaves the ticket for him anyway. Later she finds out he was among the first to visit the other Earth, and then, returning home, Rhoda comes across herself from the other Earth standing before her.

00:07:18 Mali

Guest

That's such a good moment. It's like the buildup all the way into—and it's just that *[snaps fingers]* last beat. So great.

00:07:25 April

Host

Well, you know, let's jump right into that last beat, then.

00:07:27 Mali

Guest

Mm.

00:07:28 April

Host

Because Brit Marling says, quote: "When we came up for the ending of this story, we screamed. I ran circles around Mike. We were just screaming and chasing each other. We were so excited, because you don't have a film until you have an ending. A whole film is just about arriving at a moment where you hopefully transfer some feeling to the audience. When we came to that we thought, 'Okay.

Now we can begin to think of how to make it real along the way."

00:07:50 Mali Guest Mm-hm! Oh, isn't that nice, if you always know your endings going into something?

00:07:55 April Host I mean, do you?

00:07:57 Mali Guest Almost never. All—you know. Although I am starting to realize more and more why this film has been speaking to me, because of a project that I've been working on recently that is one of the first features that I have written on my own.

00:08:11 April Host Mm-hm.

00:08:12 Mali Guest And am going to try to direct. Will be directing! That sounds better, right?

00:08:16 April Host Mm-hm!

00:08:17 Mali Guest *[April continues responding affirmatively as Mali speaks.]*  
 But it was actually a very similar situation, where I knew the ending. I knew where I needed to get to. And the freedom of that is that it's really nice, 'cause once you know the top of the mountain, you just have to figure out how to get the blocks there. Normally that's almost never the case. Whenever I've written anything is I've almost always started out with character. And most of the time I'm writing from their voices. I'm writing what I think that they would say. I know the problem. And—*[sighs]*. You do have to know what the problem is. I guess that's kinda your premise or something like that.

But for me it's almost always starting from the characters, 'cause if the characters don't move and don't feel real, I don't really know how to find my way through a scene. Maybe that's because of my background in acting or maybe that's just because I really like people and I'm kinda fascinated by them and what drives them. But for me normally that's where I would start. So this has been a very interesting experience, in just this latest one, of actually knowing—and by the way, now that I think about it, that's why it's went so much faster.

But the ending—it's funny, because I think that a lot of genre films actually can fall victim to having a really good, exciting conceit or way into something, and I think we've seen this so many times, where—be it the haunted house, be it the—you know, the campgrounds. Be it whatever. We get there and we're scared, but then it's the reveal. And it's—if the reveal can be even as important or more important than why we were there in the first place, that's really when you land a genre film. You know, the other film that I wanted to—that I had talked about was *The Orphanage*, which is one of my favorite horror films of all time.

And the reason being is 'cause I feel like you enter this world and you get absorbed deeper and deeper and deeper into it. And even though the horror is around you and it's scaring you, when you get to the ending it's actually—the meaning behind that, that is both more horrifying and beautiful. And... yeah!

00:10:10 April Host But how do you make a perfect ending, Mali? Can you—

*[Mali laughs.]*

00:10:13 Crosstalk Crosstalk **April:** Tell me! What's the step-by-step of making the perfect ending?

**Mali:** Oh, yeah! No! Oh, absolutely. It's, uh, two cups flour, one cup—no, I don't know. The per—

**April:** I mean, you've done a lot of shorts, too, and—

**Mali:** *[Whispering]* Done so many shorts.

**April:** —and shorts need to land an ending, too.

**Mali:** *[Normal volume]* They—yeah. And—

**April:** Often—more time—more often than a feature, because they really—they have a very short lifespan, and so they have to kinda hit.

00:10:35 Mali Guest *[April responds affirmatively several times as Mali speaks.]*

Oh yeah, you gotta make sure that you have—and by the way, for anybody trying to make a short film right now, make sure you have an ending. *[Laughs.]* In case I wasn't clear. That's—and also you have a lot less time to build to it. And so it's harder to get to that "ah-ha" moment. We actually call some—we call it bloody boxes over at *Fun Size Horror*.

And it's a—there's this director, Anisa, who did *The Lover*, which is in one of our vol—I think *Volume One* at this point. I don't actually even remember. And she establishes what her film is about. You dive into the world. There's a twist. And then you get to the end and you realize she's actually been killing him the whole time! Ha, ha, fun! But then you pull back and you realize there's boxes and boxes and boxes of men with all of their names on it, and you realize there's this other level.

So I think that it's also about landing an ending in which you feel like your characters had the catharsis or the arc that they needed, and then it's landing something that's specifically for the audience to have that kind of greater understanding of the world that you created, and kind of enlargen it. Which is something that's also very hard to do with short films, is how to make your world bigger than the few moments that you've been able to have on screen.

I think the perfect ending is one that gives you a greater understanding. That takes you, one, through the movie and the characters and the story, but maybe makes you ask more questions about yourself, about a situation, about life, about something bigger.

00:11:51 April Host I think with this film, Mike Cahill and Brit Marling were highly aware that what they were doing to end the film was actually something that could have been a completely separate film.

00:12:05 Mali Guest Mm-hm.

00:12:06 April Host And so part of that is because of how they came up with it. Marling said, quote, "The two of us together were batting around this idea and other ideas, initially about doing a feature that was made up of three science fiction shorts but all played with the same actress. And they would all be really divergent characters, but they all had these

sci-fi epic premises. And then the more we focused on this one, the more we thought 'Oh no, there's a whole world just in this idea of the two Earths and everyone here being there, and what does that mean? And how can you find a micro-human drama to tell within this epic sort of conceit?' Then we became obsessed with that, and the other two pieces fell away. 'This is the story; how best do we tell it?'"

00:12:44 Mali Guest

You know, and that's actually really interesting 'cause I just re-watched it not too long ago, and one of the things that I was thinking is there's a lot of... there's a lot of subtle beats. In a way this story is very small. This story is very contained. There's not actually a lot to it, and yet it feels so important as you go through it.

00:13:02 April Host

Mm-hm!

*[April continues responding affirmatively as Mali speaks.]*

00:13:03 Mali Guest

And I think that that's again because of the emotional beats, the character work and the questions that they ask throughout. I was also noticing the number of locations that they went to. I think a lot of times with all of these films, you get trapped in low budget. You don't really have the time or the energy or the space, or whatever it may be—money, always money—to move around. And they were in—I started counting. I hit at least I think 12 different locations.

And I thought how important that was to understand her place, and what she had gone through. And I think that these are scenes that a lot of times in independent films, and I—*[laughs]*. I've been this producer, who's like "You know, do we really need the bus stop? Do we really need the—? You know, that's gonna be half a day." And I was watching it and I was like "You need all of these scenes. You need all of this, because this is actually what's rounding out this character."

I think there probably could have been an anthology where you could have created three, you know, character studies about this idea. I think that it's a very broad—you know, there's so many different ideas you could have stem out of this. But honestly, I'm assuming once they dove into it, much like when you're watching it, it's such a rich character-driven film, I don't think that you—you know. I think they made the right choice.

00:14:16 April Host

Well, I'm gonna get into locations and things—

00:14:17 Mali Guest

Mm.

00:14:18 April Host

Well, maybe I'll do it right now and then we'll get back to something else. Because the reason that we're—they were able to get these locations is because they didn't—half of this film is guerrilla filmmaking. So Mike Cahill said, quote:

"Some things needed to be storyboarded because they were technically challenging. But I took that documentary background I have, which is catching things fly-on-the-wall and being able to construct a scene when we arrive on set. Some things we just shot guerrilla-style, where we'd just show up and steal a shot from in front of a prison. 'Alright, we got it, let's get out of here.' There's a certain amount of freedom in the making of it that allowed for a certain rawness that makes it feel more real, I guess."

00:14:54 Mali Guest Mm-hm.

00:14:55 April Host So, I mean... I think you're right. Like, it is tough when you're an indie producer, and—or a writer/director, and you're like, "Okay, well, I have to skim some of these locations." You know. "Let's just toss them aside." And I—you know, what Mike Cahill is saying is just like, "Well, how about if I just go out with like, me and Brit and the two other people, and we just shoot something very quickly?"

*[April responds affirmatively several times as Mali speaks.]*

00:15:21 Mali Guest Well, and that's—honestly, it's funny, dealing with... *[sighs]* you know, a lot of different situations. And especially with investors and money, you're always trying to prove why. Why you can do this. Why it's gonna be good enough. And it's very hard to say "Don't worry, we're just gonna take a camera and it's gonna look great!" Nobody wants to hear that.

And also, it's funny how many times—we actually did this with *The Party's Just Beginning*. We took a crew of seven up to Inverness between Christmas and New Year's. It was our DP Ed Lucas, Morris Millin our AD, wardrobe, and—oh, Matt and Jordan from HCT Media, who I had shot my own documentary with back here. And we just went out on—it—like, literally took Karen's three outfits and just had her walk around. And the beauty of that was A, we got to capture Inverness, and this beautiful outdoor area.

But also what we got to do is allow Karen to have moments of thought where she wasn't having to work with an entire crew. She wasn't having to do anything. And we could just move. But I remember we had to like, kinda steal this away, because it's very hard to have—to explain to people what you're trying to get and why. And it's very hard to justify that, and the only thing that you can say is "We've gotta go create some art."

Uh, and that's—*[laughs]* not something that anybody with money ever wants to hear you say, but that's honestly the truth of what we're trying to do. And I think it's hard! It's really hard for independent filmmakers who have to justify everything, and part of what we're trying to do is capture magic.

00:16:48 April Host I'm curious. Can you maybe get a little bit further into the role of investors as well? Because you do have to give them kind of proofs of concept and things. Are there investors out there who—like, they wanna see shot lists? They wanna be involved on a kind of more granular level.

00:17:06 Mali Guest You know, I've worked with every different type of investor. The things that they normally wanna be involved in is A, coming up with the budget and what you're spending it—what you're spending their money on.

00:17:16 April Host Mm-hm.

00:17:17 Mali Guest And casting is always a really big deal.

00:17:19 April Host Casting?

*[April responds affirmatively several times as Mali continues.]*

00:17:20 Mali Guest Yes. At the beginning of a production is making sure—because



what—how you cast in the beginning is how they're probably gonna be able to make their money at the end of it. I think that a— sometimes too much weight gets put on that, and—you know, especially once again going for genre indie films, part of it is capturing magic. Some of the best films have not been about the biggest names being in them, but about are you able to land a scare? Are you able to have that twist ending? Are you able to do that?

And also, genre audiences—look! There are obviously names that people like to see reoccurring within—you know, on screen. But honestly, that's not what they really care about. And so it's a little bit of a battle for us. But investors... one way or another, they wanna know that you're taking their money and that they're—you're gonna put it to good use in a way that they will be able to then take the end product and put it out to market.

And so that can come in a variety of ways. It's nice when you've worked with somebody before, or when you start to have some trust built up so that they know it. You know, as an indie producer... you know, a lot of what you have to do is build up that credibility, time and time again in a million different situations. Which is that if somebody gives you something, that you are reliable, and reliable in a bunch of different ways. Everything from keeping everybody safe, to delivering under-budget, to executing a level of quality that everybody's gonna be happy with from your director to the financier.

00:18:41 Crosstalk Crosstalk

**Mali:** Is... Is that... answer that ques—? It's a—

**April:** That's a lot.

**Mali:** It's a lot. How do I say this more simply?

**April:** *[Groans.]* I'm getting tired!

**Mali:** Oh my god, I don't know what we're gonna do—

**April:** Oh my god! Producers have to do a lot!

00:18:49 Mali Guest

I know! I was trying to make it—I was trying to tighten it, too! Shit. Man.

00:18:53 April Host

Oh, maybe that's why you're going into directing. You're like, "Let someone else, like, take care of some of this shit sometimes."

00:18:58 Mali Guest

Not even joking.

*[April laughs.]*

The first time I got to direct, I was like... I... Directing is taking responsibility for the choices. Producing is having the real responsibility for all the choices that the director makes, and making sure that that actually doesn't—*[laughs]* works.

00:19:13 April Host

Oh, yeah!

00:19:14 Mali Guest

It's really nice! I really like having just the—

*[April laughs.]*

—you know, being able to make choices.

00:19:17 April Host We're gonna take a quick break.

00:19:19 Music Music "Switchblade Comb" begins fading in.

00:19:20 April Host When we come back we're gonna talk a little bit more about the kind of connection between actors writing their own characters.

00:19:27 Mali Guest Mm-hm.

00:19:28 April Host And also shot choices and a little bit more about the kind of—like, the sci-fi premise of this film. We'll be right back.

[*Music continues until the promo.*]

00:19:42 Promo Clip **Music:** Fun, jaunty, upbeat music.

**Renee Colvert:** Hi! I'm Renee Colvert.

**Alexis Preston:** I'm Alexis Preston!

**Renee:** And we're the hosts of the smash hit podcast *Can I Pet Your Dog?* Now, Alexis.

**Alexis:** Yes.

**Renee:** We got big news.

**Alexis:** Uh-oh!

**Renee:** Since last we did a promo, our dogs have become famous.

**Alexis:** World-famous!

**Renee:** World—like, stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame! Second big news.

**Alexis:** Mm-hm?

**Renee:** The reviews are in.

00:19:59 Promo Clip **Alexis:** Mm-hm?

**Renee:** Take yourself to Apple Podcasts, you know what you're gonna hear? We're happy!

**Alexis:** It's true!

**Renee:** We're a delight! A great distraction from the world!

**Alexis:** I like that part a lot.

**Renee:** So if that's what you guys are looking for...

**Alexis:** Mm-hm.

**Renee:** You gotta check out our show! But what else can they expect?

**Alexis:** We've got dog tech, dog news, celebrities with their dogs. All dog things!

**Renee:** All the dog things. So if that interests you, well, get yourself on over to [Maximum Fun](#) every Tuesday!

*[Music ends.]*

00:20:21 Music Music

"Switchblade Comb" plays again, fading out as April speaks.

00:20:28 April Host

*[Mali responds affirmatively several times as April speaks.]*

Welcome back to *Switchblade Sisters*. I'm April Wolfe and I'm joined today by Mali Elfman, and we're talking about *Another Earth*.

*[Music fades out.]*

So! Brit Marling obviously stars in the film, and co-wrote it. Which meant that she got to have a really big hand in what her character was doing. So there's a couple of ideas that I wanted to get into in this discussion. One, here's a quote from Marling about the benefits of being the writer and the actor. Quote:

"One of the things that you do is you definitely try to push the character in a direction that you've never been before. If I feel confident that I can pull off or handle the character, I don't like that as much as when I feel a little bit nervous that I may not be able to do it. There's something about being a little nervous about doing it that makes you know that you're pushing yourself into territory that you haven't been in before. And I think when writing with Mike, we try to think about that always."

*[April responds affirmatively several times as Mali speaks.]*

00:21:18 Mali Guest

Yeah! Absolutely, and in watching that character's development throughout the film, it's... There's so many little moments, once again, I think, that could have been cut from a film if it didn't have a very clear perspective. And I think that you—it's... It doesn't always work to have an actor being the writer, but I think in this case it really helps strengthen the character, because there were so many little moments in there that enabled you to see kind of her inner psyche and what was going on in a character that was very kinda locked down and didn't know how to express herself and couldn't really grapple with the severity of what she had done.

And I have to be honest, it made it so relatable to me. Because you kind of start to put yourself in your shoes, where you start to question "Why is she like that?" And then you think, "I don't know how I would ever get past something like that, something that big." And I think that you really feel for her because you create, from the get-go, kind of a horrible character.

I mean, the opening of the film is you see somebody with all these opportunities, and—at a party, and you know, this pretty, young, everything going right, and because of a moment of negligence, causes such great harm to this family. And so you kinda create a villain right at the get-go! And, you know, how're you gonna get it

back? And the truth is humanity is understanding that forgiveness, and forgiving yourself is important for us being able to be humans with one another.

And... so yeah, I think that her having a hand in that, and also, I—absolutely—you can tell when an actor is just scared enough, I think. There's a lot of roles that are—it's important that we don't just keep writing the same roles, that we find new challenging ways into them. And I think almost all of that is people being able to literally, you know, tear into their chests and break out their heart and be like, "Look, this is what I have inside of me!"

And that is so weird and strange and pretty and ugly and smelly and fun and all those types of things, and... yeah! That's all that you want. Something smelly and fun!

00:23:26 April Host I mean, do you feel like the people that you've been working with yourself, like, what is your relationship to research?

*[April responds affirmatively several times as Mali speaks.]*

00:23:33 Mali Guest Again, every single project is different. I'm trying to—I'm thinking of two different ones that are completely opposite, which is really fun, which is *The Party's Just Beginning* for Karen, you know? She wrote it about her hometown, Inverness, about the suicide rate. She realized that it was one of the highest suicide rates that she had found amongst young men, and looked into the reasons why.

And so for her, the research was living in Inverness. Being a woman in her twenties who had something happen to her, not exactly to the story, but you know, had to grapple with situations and... and thinking about how she was gonna get through it. When I read that script, it's the only non-genre film that I've ever made, and the reason why I made it was because I read it—and I'm not from Inverness. I'm from Los Angeles. I didn't go through that story, but I knew that character. I knew what she felt. And I knew how important it was, that if I felt like that was me on the page, that was gonna feel like somebody else could relate to that. And I just felt like it came out—it came from such bold honesty!

And then I'm working right now with Laura Moss on a modern-day retelling of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* with an all-female cast, about a woman who wants to birth a child with her mind and not her body and reanimates a dead corpse. And the massive amount of research that's gone into—well, how—okay, if we could reanimate a dead corpse, how would we do that?

And the number of doctors and scientists that we've actually—really Laura has dug into with her writing partner Brendan O'Brien, that they've dug into—I mean honestly, I feel like we could reanimate a dead corpse at this point! So you know, if that movie doesn't go, maybe we got a whole other route to take in life, and I think that'd be great too.

00:25:15 April Host I love that. I—*[laughs]*.

00:25:18 Mali Guest Just reanimating the dead. That's actually what this is all leading to.

00:25:21 April Host I wanted to talk a little bit about, you know—you're talking about sci-fi

that has, you know, like a planet in the background, something in the sky. And the thing is that in 2011, there was also another movie that was doing this. Brit Marling said "*Melancholia*—"

*[Mali laughs quietly.]*

"—is dealing with a new planet. We're dealing with a new planet. I don't know if it doesn't come from people developing anxiety over running out of resources. Like, 'We'll need another one.' We're destroying this one, so we're starting to dream of another planet to inhabit or something. I don't know where it would be coming from culturally, but I feel like it's on people's minds. Maybe that's why people's responses to this movie are so primal."

But it is weird that both *Melancholia* and this film came out at the same time. They have a lot of similarities aside from just that, except for one is kind of about the kind of acceptance of annihilation of the self.

00:26:11 Mali Guest

Mm-hm.

00:26:12 April Host

And this movie is more about the acceptance of the rebirth or renewal of the self.

*[April responds affirmatively several times as Mali speaks.]*

00:26:18 Mali Guest

Yeah, one is more about forgiveness. Yeah. Yeah. I—you know, well, this goes back to the whole point of what you were saying at the beginning, is it's all about the how you get to somewhere. We see this throughout, you know, even with, like, *White House Down* and *Olympus Has Fallen*. And remember, there was one time when it was like, *District 99* and the other movie *9* that came out simultaneously? There are these things.

And that's why—I remember somebody's—you know, all these people are so afraid to like, send out their short films or send out, like, their ideas. They're like "Somebody may get it." And I was like... especially the ideas that I tend to be working on, like a female *Frankenstein*, if you think you can do it better? Have at it! 'Cause trust me, how we're gonna get there is just as important as the end result.

And also who's making it is just as important! Because like, again going back to why I now almost primarily only work with female directors and female voices, are because their perspectives and how they're achieving them are so vastly different than many of the stories that I've seen before. And again, I don't only work with female directors. I work with amazing, innovative directors that are telling stories that I've never seen before, and that happens to be all women. Which is lovely!

But it's about—this is where the writer and the director and these creators, and I would say Brit Marling is one of the creators. I know that we kinda use it more for TV terms, but you know, she kind of was one of the creators on this and obviously was in—you know, had a huge part in the overall vision for it. But the vision behind something, the intention behind something, is—can make this—you could have taken that exact same idea, given it to two people, which

more or less was—you know. Similar ideas of another Earth. And have completely different films that in no way challenge one another. There is room for both of those.

00:27:58 Mali Guest And you know, I think that it should be exciting for filmmakers to not be afraid if they hear of anything else like that, but to really go forth and... you know. Just—you know, it has to be something that's individual. It has to be a singular vision. If that's what you're making, you're gonna make something that nobody's seen before. It'd be very hard to replicate that.

00:28:17 April Host Yeah, I don't think the existence of either movie hurt either movie.

00:28:20 Mali Guest No.

00:28:21 April Host Because they were both of a certain caliber. Now, if one had kind of failed and been like, not as thought through, I could see that being a—you know, not as—not a boon to the film, you know, 'cause you're gonna be comparing. But because they are kind of all firing on all cylinders, both of them—

00:28:42 Mali Guest Mm-hm.

00:28:43 April Host —I think that it doesn't detract from either.

00:28:45 Mali Guest No, it doesn't. And—although I would say that the two of them are just so vastly different in so many ways that I feel like even if one wouldn't have—you can also like one and not like the other! They're not the same film in any way, shape, or form.

00:28:58 April Host No.

00:28:59 Mali Guest And so... But yeah, that is very interesting. I think it's also, you know, a time in which we're asking those types of questions, and there is something about a zeitgeist, and there is something about when we'll see similar—you know, projects coming around at the same time. It's 'cause a lot of people are having these discussions and trying to figure out how to deal with things.

There's a lot of people who have been looking at our current administration, and I feel like for me, I know that that changed a lot of what I was doing.

00:29:24 April Host Mm-hm.

00:29:25 Mali Guest That was when I started to work on different projects as well. And that was mainly because I think I used to be a little bit more dismal and more dark, and kinda dive into that side of genre and horror. And once this current administration was in office and Trump would—had taken control, I needed to find some joy again. I needed to deal with the seriousness of what was going on, but I had to find some happiness 'cause I wasn't sure what I was—how I was gonna make it through.

00:29:50 April Host Mm-hm.

00:29:51 Mali Guest So that is when I started to work on some different projects. That's when I took on *Growth* with Daria Durman. And it was because she wanted to tackle the world with homicidal menstrual tumors. And I'm like "Yes, this is so much fun!"

*[April laughs.]*

"The bright colors! And all the rest of this!" And I just think that, you know, again it's about those visions. It's also—and there are a lot of us trying to tackle certain ideas at the same time, and some of us may cross over. But it's having that singular voice and following through with that vision, which both of those films did to 11.

00:30:23	April	Host	Yeah. I absolutely agree.
00:30:25	Music	Music	"Switchblade Comb" starts fading in.
00:30:26	April	Host	We're gonna take another quick break. When we come back we're gonna talk a little bit about some particular shots in this, like an action shot that we should cover. And then a little bit about the tactile-ness of this film, and how to create that. And maybe a little bit about some music.
00:30:41	Mali	Guest	Mm!
00:30:42	April	Host	So we'll be right back.
			<i>[Music continues until the promo.]</i>
00:30:46	Promo	Clip	<b>Music:</b> Jazzy rendition of "Up on the House Top" by Benjamin Hanby.  <b>Speaker 1:</b> Hey, cool shirt!  <b>Speaker 2:</b> Oh, this? Thanks! I got it at <a href="https://www.maxfunstore.com">MaxFunStore.com</a> .  <b>Ethereal echo:</b> <a href="https://www.maxfunstore.com">MaxFunStore.com</a> .  <b>Speaker 1:</b> Hm, that's strange! I visited <a href="https://www.maxfunstore.com">MaxFunStore.com</a> —  <b>Ethereal echo:</b> <a href="https://www.maxfunstore.com">MaxFunStore.com</a> !  <b>Speaker 1:</b> —a few weeks ago and didn't see it.  <b>Speaker 2:</b> That's because they've <u>just</u> launched a <u>ton</u> of new stuff. Right in time for the holidays!  <b>Speaker 1:</b> Oh, cool!  <b>Speaker 2:</b> There's patches, mugs, totes, stickers. Even a onesie!  <b>Speaker 1:</b> Nice! Those would make great gifts for <u>everyone</u> I know!  <b>Speaker 2:</b> Great! Because I already got you something from there.  <b>Speaker 1:</b> Thanks! Now excuse me a moment. I need to look up <a href="https://www.maxfunstore.com">MaxFunStore.com</a> —  <b>Ethereal Echo:</b> <a href="https://www.maxfunstore.com">MaxFunStore.com</a> !  <b>Speaker 1:</b> —on my smartphone. You know, to see what's <u>new</u> !  <b>Speaker 2:</b> Yeah! You can't go wrong with <u>anything</u> from <a href="https://www.maxfunstore.com">MaxFunStore.com</a> .  <b>Ethereal Echo:</b> <a href="https://www.maxfunstore.com">MaxFunStore.com</a> !
00:31:11	Promo	Clip	

*[Music stops.]*

00:31:30 Music Music "Switchblade Comb" plays again, fading out as April speaks.  
00:31:37 April Host Welcome back to *Switchblade Sisters*. I'm April Wolfe and I'm joined today by Mali Elfman, and we're talking about *Another Earth*.

*[Music fades out.]*

So I wanted to talk a little bit about the singing saw scene, which is really beautiful. Cahill said "I was taking the subway and I heard this sound careening through the underground, and it was this enchanting, ethereal, haunting voice. It sounded like an angel dying, but in a beautiful way. This woman was playing the saw, and I took her card. For a long time we wanted William's character, as a composer, to be able to speak through music. And we thought it would be great to show that he takes back his craft as his relationship blossoms. His passion comes back.

We knew we wanted him to perform something for Rhoda, but we didn't know what. And we heard the saw, and I thought it was a hat tip to old sci-fi, that kind of Theremin sound. So it's a nod to old-school science fiction, too, but I wanted to modernize it in our own way. And I love the idea that this instrument has such a fragile sound, and yet it's a saw, which is this aggressive thing that could kill someone with. In a way, the saw poetically reflects John's character: jagged, aggressive, and yet so fragile and gentle."

00:32:40 Mali Guest Mm. I—I'm gonna talk about the saw, but also the score of this film.

00:32:45 April Host Yeah.

00:32:46 Mali Guest Which completely is reflected in that same way. It's—and without this kinda pulsing sci-fi score that also has this emotional integrity—I mean, that just pulled this entire film together and the intention and meaning behind it. And that saw, I mean, it's—I—when you see him go up there with a saw, it's kind of—again—a moment that could almost be seen as silly.

00:33:07 April Host Mm-hm.

00:33:08 Mali Guest Also because in the first scene you see the piano, and then she sees the saw. So you kinda—they kind of—I think intentionally made you think that he was a pianist, and that he was gonna go down that road and then all the sudden he pulls out a saw, and you're like—

00:33:19 Crosstalk Crosstalk **April:** Yeah, "Wait! Hold on, what is—?"

**Mali:** "He's—that's—what are—? What are you doing?"

00:33:21 Music Music The musical saw. It sounds almost like a human voice, wailing melodically. It plays uninterrupted for several seconds, and then the conversation continues over it.

00:33:35 Mali Guest And it—I mean, it sounds like a voice coming out of that thing. It sounds like a distant voice, maybe from another Earth! Ha, there we go.

*[Music fades.]*

00:33:40 April Host Mm-hm.

00:33:41 Mali Guest But it is, it's ethereal. It's—it is... I think it's hard not to feel like it's the



angels' voices kinda singing, or is it the devil, or is it what? 'Cause it's kind of at the same time enchanting, a little bit haunting?

00:33:52 April Host Mm-hm.

00:33:53 Mali Guest And scary. Which... I mean, is his soul kinda coming out in a variety of ways, and I think lets her see him for the first time in a way that she hadn't had the chance to. And also gives him the ability to come out. But his kind of coming back to life or re-emergence really comes through allowing that sadness to come out and allowing those voices to come back out through him.

And I just—[sighs]. Yeah. That saw is this beautiful voice that I don't think you could get from—once again, amazing indie filmmaking.

00:34:25 April Host Mm-hm.

00:34:26 Mali Guest You know, you get these big scores with all these choirs and all these voices and orchestral and—no, they did not have the ability to do that on something like this.

00:34:33 April Host Yeah, they had a lady from the subway who played the saw.

00:34:36 Mali Guest Perfect! And also, that's the intention! That's the meaning! That's everything, is like it's—is finding... [sighs]. Yeah, again, and just—I keep going back to indie filmmaking. It's finding the intention and the meaning behind something and being true to a character.

00:34:51 April Host Mm-hm.

00:34:52 Mali Guest And it's just—that was such a beautiful piece, and I mean, you said it perfectly. It's the—it's this beautiful instrument that's haunting, and yet it's jagged and it looks... It could be threatening, and instead it's complete beauty.

00:35:03 April Host It's—I'm curious, your relationship to kind of ushering directors into the right musical choices, or doing so for yourself.

00:35:18 Mali Guest Yeah. Well, obviously music has been, you know, a big part of my life, and listening to composers, and... [laughs] has been, you know—majority of my childhood was sitting in the back of, you know, orchestra sessions and spotting sessions and all that type of stuff. You know, because—

00:35:34 April Host Because of your father.

[April responds affirmatively as Mali continues.]

00:35:35 Mali Guest Yeah. Because my dad is a composer. You know, Danny Elfman, and he would have to work. And he would have me, you know, between having two parents separated, and so when I was with my dad I would go and sit in on orchestras. So...

But one of the fun things is I actually—I don't always work with my dad, and that's 'cause I got that little chip on my shoulder of like, you know, having to make sure that I make my own way.

00:35:55 April Host Yeah.

[They take on cartoonishly rebellious voices for the next couple of lines.]

"Fuck you, Dad! I'm doing my own thing!"

00:35:57 Mali Guest "I can do what I want!"

*[End voices.]*

And then, you know, especially when I was younger. Now I'm like, "Oh, no, it's just my dad." And I think it's—you know, you get enough stuff under your belt and you feel a little bit better about who you are.

00:36:06 April Host Yeah.

00:36:07 Mali Guest Which is probably good that I did that, for that reason! But now I've actually had a chance to work with him a few times... he's kinda good. You know, he's—he's...

00:36:12 April Host God!

00:36:13 Mali Guest I think he's going somewhere.

00:36:14 April Host God, I should—I should—I should take a look at his stuff sometime.

00:36:18 Mali Guest Sometime you—just check it out, you know. If it—you might like it.

00:36:22 Crosstalk Crosstalk **April:** Okay. Yeah.

**Mali:** It's a little bit weird. A little bit avant-garde.

**April:** Yeah.

00:36:24 Mali Guest *[April responds affirmatively as Mali speaks.]*

But one of the things that I think is funny whenever I've had to play—like, when I've gotten trapped in a score with another composer a few times, I've asked them—I always ask permission—"Do you mind if I play this for my dad? We can't figure a way out of it." And he'll play it, and... *[sighs]*. I would say 70% of the time he's like, "Cause you don't need music there."

So a lot of the times there's also over-scoring. Everybody is convinced that they're gonna make a moment out of something that isn't really there. That they didn't really capture in the right way and they're gonna fix it with this band-aid, and he's like, "It doesn't—it's not gonna do anything for you."

And the most important thing that I've learned about music is that a lot of people try to go in and talk to composers like, "I think you need a piano score! You know what, a cello would be..."

Go in and say "This is what this character wants. These are the intentions behind the scene." I never try to speak about, you know, instruments or something like that. I—

00:37:14 April Host Yeah. If it's not what you're doing, then like, they should be the one to discover that.

00:37:18 Mali Guest It just—yes! It doesn't matter! What matters is the emotional integrity of what you're trying to accomplish!

00:37:23 April Host Yeah.

00:37:24 Mali Guest And that can be a huge orchestra. Or that can be a guy with a saw. That can be a single piano player. That can be so many different things, and trying to box yourself into that—so the one thing that I have learned is that apparently I speak composer. And also when

composers get frustrated, I know how to—I'm like, "Oh, don't worry, I got this."

00:37:42 April Host *[Amused]* Mm!

00:37:43 Mali Guest I've had to deal with my dad my whole life, so it's, uh—it's been... It's interesting. I think people think that I'm gonna know more about music. And I don't. I've listened to a lot of music, and that's the most that I can say, and I like music.

00:37:58 April Host Yeah.

00:37:59 Mali Guest But I am in no way educated at all.

00:38:02 April Host That's not the path you chose.

*[April responds affirmatively a few times as Mali continues.]*

00:38:04 Mali Guest No. And nor does anybody really need to be. I think they need to—a director needs to know what their intentions are. And then they can speak to any composer. And any composer who wouldn't listen to that, you probably shouldn't work with.

But I personally love score. I love going—you know, I just did this, uh—well, I can—*The Party's Just Beginning*, we worked with Pepijn Caudron, who goes by Kreng. And it was so much fun because I think a lot of people when we first started—it was female writer, director, starring, producer, and female perspective film. All these types of things. Everybody assumed that we would want, like, this pretty—like, lady score.

And I was just like—and then Kreng came in and he did this drum and bass, like, boom! Boom! Boom! And we're like, "Fuck yeah! That's what we want!"

*[April laughs.]*

And it was so nice! It was also so nice 'cause he didn't go for any of the cliché things. And so I just worked with Nima on *Locker Room Z*, the short that I did for Amazon. And it is so much fun. 'Cause I really—he's like, "You don't need that much score," and I was like, "But I want it." And I did exactly what my father would probably tell me not to do and I over-scored it, but I had so much fun doing it!

*[April laughs.]*

*[Sighs.]* And you know, for me, that one was—you know, it's a bunch of women in a locker room where, you know, just don't bleed around the blood zombies. I think you can see where some of that might go.

00:39:28 April Host Mm-hm!

00:39:29 Mali Guest And then the zombies are all bleeding rainbows, because fuck it, they can!

*[April laughs.]*

And like, all these metaphors in there. And so I just really wanted it to be over the top and have a lot of fun, and I think—there's also time for that. Sometimes—

00:39:40 April Host Yeah there is!  
00:39:41 Mali Guest Sometimes we need to have some fucking fun!  
00:39:42 April Host Yeah. Sometimes you should knowingly break the rules if you wanna be outrageous. Do like a Cyndi Lauper version of those things.  
00:39:49 Mali Guest Oh, yeah!  
00:39:50 April Host Well, I guess that's a great time, uh, place to wrap up.

*[Mali laughs.]*

Thank you so much for coming in today to talk about *Another Earth*, and where can people see or expect to see some of your stuff coming up?

00:40:02 Mali Guest Ah, let's see. *Fun Size Horror Shocktale Party* is on Amazon now. *The Party's Just Beginning* is on Hulu in the US, iTunes and Amazon, and then comes out in the UK December 1st. So you're gonna be able to see that soon. And then I have right now doing the festival circuit is *Neurotica*. by Laura Moss.  
00:40:23 April Host Mm-hm.  
00:40:24 Mali Guest And hopefully we'll find a home for that soon. That's a pilot. And then everything else is, you know, TBD!  
00:40:28 Music Music "Switchblade Comb" starts fading in.  
00:40:29 April Host Alright. TBD.

*[Mali laughs.]*

Thank you so much for coming in.

00:40:32 Mali Guest Thank you so much for having me; this was so much fun.  
00:40:33 April Host And thank you for listening to *Switchblade Sisters*. If you like what you're hearing, please leave us a five-star review on Apple Podcasts. If you do, I'll read it on air! We've got BBBB saying:

"I waited far too long to give *Switchblade Sisters* a listen. It's lots of fun listening to April and her awesome guests talk about my favorite movies and introduce me to new ones."

Thank you so much, BBBB! If you want to let us know what you think of the show, you can Tweet at us at [@SwitchbladePod](https://twitter.com/SwitchbladePod) or email us at [switchbladesisters@maximumfun.org](mailto:switchbladesisters@maximumfun.org). And please check out our Facebook group, that's [Facebook.com/groups/switchbladesisters](https://www.facebook.com/groups/switchbladesisters). Our producer is Casey O'Brien, our senior producer is Laura Swisher, and this is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org).

*[Music finishes.]*

00:41:18 Clip Clip **Rhoda:** I felt like... anything was possible.  
00:41:21 Music Transition A cheerful guitar chord.  
00:41:22 Speaker 1 Guest [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org).  
00:41:24 Speaker 2 Guest Comedy and culture.  
00:41:25 Speaker 3 Guest Artist owned—

00:41:26 Speaker 4 Guest —audience supported.