

00:00:00	Music	Transition	“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw. A jaunty, jazzy tune reminiscent of the opening theme of a movie that plays for several moments, then slowly fades out under dialogue.
00:00:08	April Wolfe	Host	Welcome to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> , where women get together to slice and dice our favorite action and genre films. I’m April Wolfe. 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. Perhaps one that’s influenced their own work in some small way. And today, I’m very excited to have writer-director Jenn Wexler here. Hi, Jenn!
00:00:28	Jenn Wexler	Guest	Hi! Thanks for having me.
00:00:30	April	Host	Jenn’s here all the way from New York City!
00:00:33	Jenn	Guest	Yes, the Big Apple. <i>[April laughs.]</i>
00:00:36	April	Host	Ah, the “City that never sleeps”.
00:00:39	Jenn	Guest	Man, I don’t know where anybody got any of those.
00:00:40	April	Host	I don’t know what else—there’s a lot. Um, for those of you not as familiar with Jenn’s work, please let me give you an introduction. Jenn grew up in suburban New Jersey, before studying film in the big city: Philadelphia, that is. After graduating from the University of Arts, Jenn took off to Sony Lionsgate in Los Angeles, correct? <i>[Jenn affirms.]</i> Um, to their horror channel Fearnnet, where she became marketing coordinator. So, for four years, she learned about the horror industry from the marketing side while making short films in her spare time. So, when she met Larry Fessenden and Peter Polk of Glass Eye Pics in New York, correct? <i>[Jenn affirms again.]</i> Um, she was ready to say, “I want to be a producer.” So she moved to New York and started producing shorts for Fessenden’s company, but her first feature as lead producer was Anna Acensio’s big indie hit, <i>Most Beautiful Island</i> . Which, if you guys haven’t read the Vulture’s Top 100 scares, we did include it in that. And, between 2014 and 2019, she produced <i>Darling</i> , <i>Like Me</i> — I really love <i>Like Me</i> , I gave a great review to that one. <i>Psychopaths</i> , and <i>Depraved</i> , also great. Um, but back in 2015, she also started writing on a project with Jacko Ferino, a story called <i>The Ranger</i> , that she took to Fantasia Film Fest’s frontiers’ market in 2016. Um, and that helped her get financing and production in place for her feature directorial debut. <i>The Ranger</i> tells the story of some good-old down home teen punks, up against a deranged park ranger for an all-out battle of survival in the woods. The film premiered at South by Southwest,

and went to AMC's shutter-streaming channel. And, if you all remember, listeners, Heather Buckley who produced on that film came on and uh, talked about another great and challenging movie. [Laughs.]

00:02:21 Jenn Guest

Yes, Henry. *Portrait of a Serial Killer*.

00:02:25 April Host

We've got another challenging one coming up. Now, but since then, um, Jenn has tried her hand at directing TV, with the CW series *Pandora*.

[Jenn affirms.]

And a bunch of other stuff on the way from you. Um, so Jenn, the movie that you chose to talk about today is *Ms. 45*. Uh, can you give us a little explanation on why this is one of your fave genre films?

00:02:46 Jenn Guest

Yeah, absolutely. So, it's my favorite rape revenge movie. I really love tonally how it walks this fine line between horror and humor, and does it really expertly. Um, I love it because New York, you know. Early 80's New York plays such a character in the movie. And then, you know, just from having made all these indie New York movies the past couple of years, I really respect how the movie says so much using so little.

00:03:18 April Host

Well, it is actually quite spare.

00:03:20 Jenn Guest

It is.

00:03:21 April Host

Um, even more so than I remembered watching it again. Um, but for those of you who haven't seen *Ms. 45*, today's episode will give you some spoilers. But that shouldn't stop you, before you listen, before you watch, as always, my motto is that it's not what happens, but how it happens that makes a movie worth watching. Still, if you would like to pause, and watch *Ms. 45* first, this is your shot.

00:03:40 Music Music

"Ms. 45 Dance Party" off the album *Ms. 45* by Joe Delia

00:03:42 April Host

And now that you're back, let me introduce *Ms. 45*.

Written by Nicky St. John, as Abel Ferrara calls him, and directed by Abel Ferrara, *Ms. 45* stars Zoë Tamerlis Lund as Thana, a mute junior seamstress in 1981 New York City. It's a rough and tumble time for the city, as one day Thana walks home from work and is raped by an assailant in an alley in broad daylight. Her day gets worse when she retreats into the solace of her apartment to face a robber, who also rapes Thana at gunpoint. During the assault, Thana goes through a psychological transformation, grabs a little apple figure, and knocks the man out. And then, bludgeons him to death with an iron before carrying him into her bathtub.

The next day, she's a little off, as you might expect. And the apparent concern of her coworkers can never compete with her actual trauma.

00:04:35 Clip Clip

[A cacophony of concerned voices asking Thana if she's alright, as ominous music swells in the background.]

00:04:51	April	Host	She goes home and dismembers the man, stashing him in different trash bags. Backing up the drains in her apartment building, and alerting the neighbor's dog Phil to the quote-unquote, "meat". Thana throws one of the bags into a public trash, and a man grabs the bag and chases after her to return it.
00:05:08	Clip	Clip	Heckler: Hey baby! Your bag! You forgot your bag!
00:05:12	April	Host	But Thana shoots him, and kills him, thinking she's about to get raped again. And it kinda thrills her. But also makes her sick. When her boss Albert invites her to a Halloween party and gets fresh with her.
00:05:24	Clip	Clip	Albert: It's the Halloween party on the 31st. All of us are going. You should come, too. There'll be boys your own age. You'll enjoy yourself.
00:05:38	April	Host	Thana internalizes her rage, and lets it out, and a handful of men that cross her path die. Including a fashion photographer who lures her to his loft apartment for nefarious purposes.
00:05:49	Clip	Clip	Photographer: Listen, uh, what do you say, my studio's right around the corner, nobody's gonna be there, it's Friday, and we'll take a test.
00:05:57	April	Host	A gang of burly dudes who had circled her, a pimp who beats up his prostitute, a Saudi businessman who propositions her, and finally a man who ends up using Thana's gun to kill himself. I mean, that was unexpected. It should be noted she puts the gun to his head the second he says he strangled a cat.
00:06:14	Clip	Clip	Man in Bar: And I went out to the kitchen, and I strangled her cat.
00:06:18	April	Host	And at home, Phil the pup is hot and bothered for that dead body. So Thana takes him for a walk and dumps him. And then she gets ready for the Halloween party, dressing in a nun's habit with heavy makeup. At the party, her boss Albert comes onto her, and tries to fuck her. She kills him, and then erupts into the main party and shoots a bunch of men, before pausing when she sees a man dressed as a woman, giving enough time for her coworker to stab her. Her final and only word in the film is...
00:06:44	Clip	Clip	Thana: <i>[Whispers]</i> Sister...
00:06:47	Jenn	Guest	Yep, so good.
00:06:49	April	Host	Gimme your best "sister." Sister.
00:06:51	Jenn	Guest	Oh, man.
			<i>[She affects a creepy whisper.]</i>
			Sistaaaahhh...
			<i>[They go back and forth whispering "sister", and April laughs.]</i>
00:06:59	April	Host	Okay, so. I think—I mean, let's bring up something. Uh, I should say that, before we even get into this, that Abel Ferrara is kind of

notorious for not giving the best sound bites in interviews. He's, you know, he doesn't—he almost, like, resists talking about process. And we'll get into that, too, in terms of what that means as a filmmaker, or why he does that. Um, so, some of the things that I pulled are from his colleagues, um, Jack McIntyre who's a creative consultant who works with him quite a bit. Um, I couldn't find any Nicholas St. John interviews that were usable.

Um, but then there's some things from Joe Delia, who is his—or was his frequent collaborator when it comes to music. Um, but, Alexandra Heller Nicholas wrote a book about *Ms. 45* that people should check out. And, for the Blu-ray version Kayla Genise wrote a booklet essay that is quite useful and helpful. Um, but, when it comes to—you're talking about this idea of the woman at the end of the party, Laurie, dressed as a man, evoking those. And then, the man that she hesitates to shoot dressed as a woman. I think it's an interesting thing that Alexander Heller Nicholas points out within this idea of what that means, and she kind of waxes poetic on that.

What should we take away from that? She's killed with this phallic instrument, the knife is held crotch level. And the man's wearing a wedding dress. And, gender is extremely mixed up throughout this entire Halloween section.

00:08:37 Jenn Guest Absolutely. And I've also read that book, so you know, my take on it is, I think, influenced by that. And I think it's a smart take on it, which is, um, that Thana, throughout the movie, is kind of seeing, um, you know, good/bad, man/woman, in these very binary terms. And I think that the movie is saying that, like, there is more nuance than we like to give this conversation. We like to simplify things into good and bad. And, you know, especially when this movie was made, in 1980, which was—now we're in a new phase of feminism, so we're seeing things at this moment different than—as a society, people were seeing things in 1980.

But I think that it's actually very post-feminist, that the movie is essentially saying, like, “Just killing men doesn't solve all the problems. You have to look at the nuance, and you also have to look at the—Another thing I really like about the movie is that it also...

[She stammers.]

You know, her boss is the like climactic death of the movie. And, um, it's kind of saying something about how this is all systemic, and how the patriarchy as a whole is what is keeping women down.

00:09:55 April Host Yeah! Because Albert is not necessarily raping her throughout, but there are these very subtle things that are kind of keeping her in her place throughout the film, you know? He's the one who lives, you know, but—

00:10:09 Jenn Guest For sure, patting her on the head, um, you know, massaging her. Just talking down to her, just mansplaining about everything to her.

[April laughs.]

00:10:20 April Host Um, and keeping with this idea of, kind of, the blurring of gender towards the end of the film, you know, because there was kind of a first half, and a second half. I would say this is almost like a two act structure, in a sense. Close to it. There's the transformation that Thana goes through, and one of the things that I think is really, really effective is the fact that Thana gets her own taxi driver style moment. And it's essentially when she's looking at a mirror, and she's got the gun, and she's dressed in the nun habit with the makeup on, and she like looks sexy, and she's pointing the gun, and there's great sound design and music that accompanies it, too, where you realize that she's living in this insane fantasy, that she is just like, enjoying it now. She's kind of gotten to that um, you know, like, "Are you looking at me?" Like, that kind of thing.

And she gets to enjoy it. But I also see it in a different manner than I see the taxi driver one. Can you talk a little bit about how you take that scene?

00:11:23 Jenn Guest Yeah, for sure. And I think, I mean, Abel Ferrara does that in different parts of the movie, where he takes these kinds of famous New York movies, and he does it with Woody Allen in *Manhattan*, and he subverts them for this film. So, there's the taxi driver moment in the mirror, and then there's also um, when they're sitting by the Queen's Burrow bridge, uh, and it's, in Manhattan, it's very romantic and here it ends up with the guy blowing his brains out after he talks about strangling the cat.

But, in terms of the taxi driver moment, um, yeah, it's really her feeling herself, so to speak. It's really her in her element, she's come on this journey, and it's her being on her most, you know, "feminine", again. I put that in quotes, uh, like, "voluptuous", "vampy", playing this role. Little girl playing a role in makeup, kissing the bullets, painting her lips in red. And she's going to a Halloween party. And she's dressed like, you know, she's like the bride of Christ. Um, so there's...I mean, there's so much going on there, and then—

00:12:37 April Host There's almost like a—because of the way her face is made up with like, deep red lipstick and things, there's almost like a technicolor like, Black Narcissus feel to it, as well.

00:12:47 Jenn Guest Yeah, and it's just like a very private moment with her. We get a lot of private moments with her throughout, but this is her really being her, in her moment.

00:12:58 April Host You know, I think, one of the things that really hit me when I was looking at um, some of the process of casting was how he had found Zoë. How she came to him. Um, he said, quote:

"When you have a script like *Ms. 45*, you have to find the girl. If you don't have the girl, you don't have anything. This was a no-budget film, and I'm seeing women, and Zoë got my phone number. She comes to where I live, and I remember, I'm looking through the peep-hole. When somebody comes off the elevator, you know right away if she's right or not for a movie like this. She comes waltzing in the door with this dumb boyfriend, she's 17 years old, at Columbia

on a music scholarship. She understood every fucking facet. Sat down, had the script analyzed, she was auditioning me. I said, 'You gotta be kidding me.' We cast her, and we did the film."

And I think that that's something that people forget about—the fact that actors actually do a lot of work analyzing scripts, and they work with directors analyzing story and script, and there's the joke, you know, that someone, an actor's on set, and it's like, "What's my motivation for this?"

[Jenn affirms.]

You know, that's—it's, like, silly, but there's a great deal of work that goes into things beforehand, and an actor has to have a handle on it. Can you talk about that kind of relationship that you have to develop with your actors before that?

00:14:09 Jenn Guest Absolutely. Yeah, I mean, it's all about trust, and it's all about creating the relationship with the actor, and creating the conversation, and creating the understanding. And you're building this thing together, because as the director, well, you're seeing—you know, you're seeing the overall story, and you're seeing how the different pieces fit together, but you're not inhabiting the character, you're not going deep into the interior of a character, and that's up to the actor.

So you're—I kind of see it as the director has the overall bird's eye view, and the actor is going deep into themselves and pulling out the things to fit those nuances that bird's eye view needs. And all that just comes out with trust. So the way that I usually work with my actors is, you know, I become best friends with them. I wanna be their best friend, I wanna develop the same language as them, so when we are on that stuff that's happening, as soon as—from the first conversation, even before they're cast, I'm seeing if, like, "Do we click?"

Um, and that's a relationship that's being developed all through prep, and then, um, you know, the goal is that when you're on set, you have that language with the person, that you just are able to say one word, and they know what—like, tonal, what part of the tonal range to key into. And those conversations, you know, I don't like to do them in the middle of everything going on, there's so much going on during production as it is, that you really have to have that understanding long before anybody gets to set.

00:15:50 April Host I've definitely seen scripts where they're marked up to the point where there's just no white space anywhere, because there's so many notes on just, what happens here, why this happened, you know, like studying the script that worked beforehand.

00:16:06 Jenn Guest For sure, yeah, no, you're talking out all the different motivations with the actor, and I like to have these relationships with all the department heads, also. Like, I have my relationship with the actor, and we have our language, but I also have my language with the DP, and I also have my language with the production designer so that, while you are in the middle of everything, you know, you're

speaking these different languages, and you're able to say two words to this person over here, and then they're like, "Got it, that's back from our conversation in prep, and this is how it needs to be adjusted."

00:16:42	April	Host	Uh, we're gonna take a quick break, when we come back we're gonna talk a little bit more about Abel Ferrara's process, um, his non-process, a little bit about the score, because the score of this movie is really wonderful, and in general kind of New York filmmaking at the time. Uh, we'll be right back.
00:16:58	Music	Transition	"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:17:03	Promo	Promo	Music: Intense sci-fi music. Narrator: Fairhaven's a hip town. Craft breweries, killer music scene. There's only one catch: the bloodthirsty monsters. <i>[Yelling and shouting in the background.]</i> Hunny: Feel free to hit the deck while we lay down some suppressing fire. Morgan Kay: You're gonna kill them?! Hun: Nah, these are shock rounds, so it should just knock them out. We use these on the kids after they've had too much sugar cereal. Hunny: Hun, stop! We do not! He's such a jokester, this one. Anyway, hit the deck, please! <i>[Thudding. Hun and Hunny scream. The following dialogue is punctuated by gunfire and moaning targets.]</i> Hun: Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Get some! Hunny: Take that! Take it! Hun: Get some! Hunny: Yeah! <i>[Hun laughs triumphantly.]</i> Oh, good job, Hun! That was great! Hun: Awww, you're the best. Narrator: <i>Bubble</i> . The sci-fi comedy from MaximumFun.org . Just open your podcast app and search for <i>Bubble</i> . <i>[Music ends.]</i>
00:17:54	Music	Transition	"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:18:00	April	Host	Welcome back to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> , I'm April Wolfe, and I'm joined today by Jenn Wexler, and we're talking about <i>Ms. 45</i> .

Uh, so. Something that is very interesting to think about is the fact that, um, Nicholas St. John and Abel Ferrara were working together for like, a long time before this. They were doing kind of short films, and experimental things. You know, they did a porn film together, uh, *Nine Lives of a Wet Pussy*, um, before they did *Driller Killer*. But their partnership in creative collaboration kind of stretches back pretty far. But it wasn't always kind of set in stone who was doing what, and how they were going to be doing it, kind of came together in a sense as an art collective. And um, Abel Ferrara said:

"In the beginning, we all kind of worked on everything. One time Nicky would be the writer, and I would be the director, he would act, then I would act, we were cranking them out. We got the relationship where Nicky was writing, though, and then I was directing, and then *Ms. 45* came to me absolutely written. Shot for shot, beat for beat. I had no idea he was working on it. It was a pretty great gift to get. When you read something like that, it's not like, 'Oh, man, it used to be that maybe it could be more of this,' it's more, 'Oh shit, dude, when did you come up with this?'"

[Jenn laughs.]

I think it's interesting that people kind of fall into where they should be, when it comes to this. There's also the story where people fall into things, and can't get out of the role that they were put into. Um, but it's nice that they kind of discovered that maybe Abel Ferrara wasn't the best at writing, that his energy is best directed at being on set, and working with those actors, and getting this kind of magic, and then Nicholas St. John is more geared to the actual writing and structuring of the story.

00:19:47 Jenn Guest

Yeah, I mean, I find that it's so important, uh, as a filmmaker to have an understanding of all parts of making a movie. And um, you know, you talk about the collective mentality, and that's definitely what we had at Glass Eye Pix, and Larry Fessenden, the head of Glass Eye, comes from, you know, the East Village art scene of the early 80's, and um, I just get the sense from hearing his stories, and hearing other filmmakers talk about it—it wasn't even just film, it was music, it was art, and everybody was just, like, excited to be creating things, and jumping in, and doing what they needed to do to create the thing.

And that's—it was really cool, because Larry certainly carried that with him, and over my time at Glass Eye Pix, that was our approach to movies. You know, I produce a lot of movies, but as a producer, I was also doing a million other things, because we're working with low budgets, and we're working with small crews, and you know, you have the gaffer on one movie who's DPing the next movie, and um, I would produce things, and then I directed *The Ranger*, and then my key grip was also my co-editor on *The Ranger*. So its like, just—it's kind of really fun and loose, because... There are rules, obviously, in that you make sure everybody's safe, safety is obviously #1, and you make sure people are getting paid, and things like that, but um, in terms of structure, it was very loose. And it's a tight-knit community of people who are all trying to create

together.

- 00:21:31 April Host I mean, you see that, for sure, when you see um, people show up as extras or background or as small parts, when you're just like, "Oh, their name—oh, that was the grip." *[Laughs.]*
- 00:21:44 Jenn Guest Yeah, exactly. We do that in *Glass Eye* all the time. On *The Ranger*, in our—we have this opening like, punk club warehouse party scene, and it's literally, you can look through the credits and if you're familiar with like, New York filmmakers, it's like, "Oh, Ted Geoghegan's in there, and Mike Gingold's in there." It's just like, all of our friends came out to be part of the party.
- 00:22:08 April Host Oh, all of these people seem familiar in some manner that I can't quite put my finger on. Of course, Larry Fessenden shows up in, you know, even if he just has a cameo in things, you're like, "Oh yeah, of course he's here!"
- 00:22:22 Jenn Guest Absolutely. Well, for *The Ranger*, after producing a bunch of movies that, you know, he had cameos in, I was like, "Okay, I need my Larry Fessenden cameo role." So I cast him as the uncle, and of course he dies, 'cause he's died in so many movies that he has a death reel. And uh, yeah, I felt that it was a true *Glass Eye* movie because of that.
- 00:22:41 April Host Oh, thank God, right? Yeah, just put your stamp on it.

[Jenn affirms.]

Um, I wanted to talk about—you brought up earlier, you know, when you don't have money for a film, and you're really just kind of doing it, we're just like, "We all have to pitch in, we all have to do these things." It is extremely difficult in the early stages, especially if you're trying to convince people to become part of your stable. Um, and Joe Delia, who's the composer who works with Abel Ferrara, he had some interesting things to say. He knew Abel, obviously, from a very long time ago.

He said, when they met, "I had heard about Abel through my brother Frank, who was one of his earlier photographers—uh, cinematographers. I was introduced when he went to Rockland Community College up there. He knew I was a musician, and we hit it off, and it might have been '76 or '77, and when we did *Driller Killer* later on. Uh, I was a session player coming from the Hit Factory, taking a cab downtown and meeting up with this renegade crew of filmmakers, so it was a culture shock for me. They were my brother's friends. I wasn't really sure what they were up to at that point. I wasn't quite getting the whole thing.

"*Driller Killer* was difficult for me to work with because the imagery was blatant and graphic and over the top, and a lot of the times I'd turn away from the screen to play. But I wasn't convinced there was anything happening artistically yet. It took awhile to get what was actually going on. As *Ms. 45* came up, I think that Abel started maturing out of these blatant, over the top, gratuitous films he made, but they got him into the business, which was remarkable. His great talent was to get funding for films."

You know, Joe Delia like, coming from making money as a session musician and then taking on these jobs where he'd have to work like a month, two months on a movie that he's like, "I don't get it." You know?

00:24:24 Jenn Guest Yeah, absolutely. I mean, um, that's always the—bringing people on is part of the art, I think, of making low-budget movies. You have to really—and it's interesting in that, that he didn't even fully get it. But um, I think our approach is really sealing collaborators on the magic, the—its the process of making the movie, it's the process of collaborating, it's the art of it. It's not just for the paycheck. Like, there are those jobs of course, and everybody should be working those jobs.

Um, but from time to time, it's nice to be able to indulge in this like—in this passion project that doesn't have—might not have the proper funding. And you can't do that forever. You can't do that every time, but you know your—and, as a producer, when those people come on board like, you know, we have to really appreciate that, and we have to take care of them, and we have to treat them like they're part of our family. Um, you have to treat people well in those situations, obviously. And that's part of the magic of it all, that everyone's having fun and creating together.

00:25:31 April Host Was there anyone who you were like, "Oh, we are so particularly lucky to get this person"? Best behavior, treat them well, let them know like, we're serious, next film is gonna be a little more.

00:25:44 Jenn Guest Uh, I think I approach every collaborator that way, but um, certainly with Jeremy Holm, who plays The Ranger. He is, you know, used to making *Mr. Robot* and *House of Cards*, so he was in mind for my co-writer, Giaco Furino and I. Like, as we were writing it we had him in mind, and we were watching *Mr. Robot*. He has like, a very strong chin. I was like, fantasizing about his like, chin.

[Both laugh.]

Very Superman chin. And then, you know, we sent him the script, and he—we met up with him. He liked the script. I mean, coming from, you know, these big TV shows, I think he was slightly skeptical. Like, "Okay, what am I getting into?" But he was also excited. And as it started rolling, like as we started going and, you know, he came on set, and yes, it was small. We had a small crew. It certainly wasn't a *Mr. Robot* size shoot, but as we were going, he started having so much fun.

And he has become like, the biggest supporter an biggest fan of like, our Glass Eye movies. He absolutely loves what we do now, and he like—he just had a really great time throughout. So, it was very cool getting to go on that process, and kind of seeing his skepticism at first, and then like now, he's just—we're just like, great collaborators, and he's one of my favorite people.

00:27:13 April Host Yeah, because when you take a big actor out of, you know, the big pond and bring him to your small pond, the best thing you can give

them is some fun. [Laughs.]

- 00:27:22 Jenn Guest Yes. Absolutely. So, it's like, yeah, the budget's small, you won't be paid much, but you get to come up to the woods, you get to like, be the Ranger. And he, you know, was a fan of all these like, old TV shows and stuff, so he like, really loved the character and was excited to play that role. But um, we'll, you know, we're gonna have some fun, and that's what we can promise.
- 00:27:49 April Host One of the things that I really liked is the fact that Joe Delia, as a session musician, he really had to change his process to work with Abel Ferrara, because he wanted to write everything beforehand. And the thing is that when you're kind of creating with him, with Abel Ferrara, you have to kind of be light on your feet. And so it ended up being that as much as Joe Delia wanted to write his themes beforehand, he would often have to throw things out the window in the moment, because they would be in that loft, and they would be watching the movie together, and the two of them would be scoring it together.
- It was a two-person job. Um, Abel would work the recording sometimes, and Delia would be the musician. Sometimes they would switch off, because Ferrara himself is a musician as well. Um, and it was something where they had to improvise, especially at the end. So, things were much more composed, and they knew exactly what they were doing in the first half. Those are much more contained. But then when things just started to go off their kind of rocker towards the end, it had to be improved, because it just wouldn't suit the mood sometimes.
- 00:28:56 Jenn Guest Hmm. Yeah, I mean, well it's—Abel is a musician, so that's—that's his—he's coming at it from actually a more knowledgeable place than like, in my own experience working with composers, is just uh, it's a different level. Because you really have to speak—you—with all department heads, I think you really have to talk about things in terms of emotion. That's the universal language in filmmaking, emotion.
- Uh, I don't have a music background at all, so working with my composers, Wade MacNeil and Andrew Gordon-Macpherson, it was, you know, very much like, I would—some of the stuff they just like, got right away. But it was talking about like, okay, what's the emotional arc that the character is going through, and um, what do we want here? And it's like, um, sending them examples.
- Also, when you temp—it doesn't sound like they temped for *Ms. 45*—but when, you know, using temp scores in your edits is really hard for a filmmaker, because you get attached to the temp scores. So, uh, we were really lucky in that they were able to start feeding me music early, and I was—I didn't get too attached to any temp score, because I was actually using the music that they were creating.
- 00:30:10 April Host That's nice.
- 00:30:11 Jenn Guest Yeah. But then there are still some moments like, you know, we had our back and forths, and I did find that the most effective way to talk

about the music was really to talk about it from an motional perspective. One scene specifically that I recall having a conversation about is in the um, um, gas station scene, where uh, Jerk, played by Jeremy Pope, is running away from The Ranger, and I think their initial approach was to take it in more—in a—more like, kind of insidious thing, and I was like, “No, this is like a chase. We want to like, up the tempo.” And when we started talking about it in terms of chase terminology, I think that they, you know, they got it, and they created this really cool like, dark carnival kind of cue for it, which I absolutely loved.

00:31:03 Music Transition

“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:31:04 April Host

We’re gonna take a quick break. When we come back, I’m gonna talk a little bit about another actor that’s kind of hard to—er, person that’s hard to communicate with on set, and that’s animals. Um, so Phil. Uh, and then we’ll also be talking a little bit more about novice actors, working with those, guerilla filmmaking and locations, all that kind of stuff. So, we’ll be right back.

[Music plays for several more seconds and fades.]

00:31:30 Promo Promo

Music: Dramatic, movie trailer–esque music.

[The hosts use very “announcer” voices in this promo.]

Mark Gagliardi: We interrupt the podcast you're listening to to tell you about another podcast! That's right: [We Got This with Mark and Hal](#).

Hal Lublin: That's correct, Mark! This is Hal. We do the hard work for you! Settling all of the meaningless arguments you have with your friends.

Mark: So tune in every week on the Maximum Fun network for *We Got This with Mark and Hal*, and all your questions will be asked... and answered.

Hal: You're welcome!

[Music reaches an apex and quiets down.]

Mark: Alright. That's enough of that.

Chorus: *[Singing] We Got This!*

00:31:59 Music Transition

“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:32:06 April Host

Welcome back to *Switchblade Sisters*. I’m April Wolfe and I’m joined by Jenn Wexler, and we’re talking about *Ms. 45*.

I think uh, we should talk a little bit about um, Abel Ferrara seeing this movie for the first time in a theater. “Cause this was like a very interesting time for film. Exploitation was really big. This movie is, as many people attest to, their favorite rape revenge movie, and a lot of it has to do with the kind of like, comic overtimes, but also a fairly overt feminism exuded from Zoë Lund that you don’t often get from

something like, we'll say *I Spit on Your Grave*, right? I see those two in very different means and manners.

And it was a really kind of surreal experience for Abel Ferrara to watch this in a theater for the first time, because it was part of a double feature. And this is something that I found very interesting, because there was a movie that was playing before, and I can't remember what the name is, but it's an Idi Amin story, like an exploitation. Idi Amin's story, where they're just like, guys blowing people away. Just like, violence, violence, just like, massacres, that it's just like people cheering in the theaters, and this is what he's watching before *Ms. 45* comes on. It's just like, men just like, killing men, nonstop, cheers.

Then Abel Ferrara says, "Movie ends, and then up comes *Ms. 45*. They rape her the first time. It's like a comedy, okay? This is like, 'Oh shit, it's a rape, they're raping a young—' Yeah, man. They were so into raping this chick that I was embarrassed to be there. I was mortified. I not only directed in it, I acted in it. I'm raping her."

[Jenn laughs.]

"You can just imagine. Then the second rape, they do it even more. The audience is now exhilarated. Then she starts shooting the guys, and this audience, as loud as they got for Idi Amin and the rapes, they were quiet. When she blasts that dude between the legs with that gun, I'm telling you, bro. It was like, I mean, I was stunned."

00:34:10 Jenn Guest

That's so funny.

00:34:11 April Host

Isn't that interesting, where like, this audience is like, "Yeah, yeah, violence, violence! Let's do it!" And then the second that the woman takes control and starts shooting these dudes, they were like, "We don't like this."

00:34:20 Jenn Guest

Oh my god. Well, it's kind of proving the movie true, actually.

[April affirms.]

Um, yeah, I mean, the movie is smarter than it should be, and it is funny, but in—it's funny in a smart way. It's funny in a—not in an overt way, not in a "let's laugh at people experiencing pain". In fact, the rape scenes, you know, you're in her perspective. Um, you know, a difference between this movie and a lot of rape revenge movies are, in the beginning of a lot of rape revenge movies you have the girl, she gets raped, and then the rest of the movie is her finding those exact dudes and killing those guys. And in this movie, you know, she never sees either—well, she kills the one rapist in her apartment—

00:35:10 April Host

Yeah, in the moment.

00:35:11 Jenn Guest

Right, in the moment she, uh, cuts him up. And then, so hilarious, so human, is uh, "Okay, well I've killed the guy, he's in my bathtub. I'm chopping him up. Now what do I do with the body? I guess I'll drop him off in different parts of the city." And that's like, such a

like—yeah, I think I would do that exact same thing. That makes complete sense.

- 00:35:31 April Host Yeah, there's a logic to it.
- 00:35:32 Jenn Guest Absolutely. Um, so that becomes really relatable too, like what would you do in this situation? And um, but she never sees the first guy in the alley again. And so it becomes a bigger thing. It's not just war on specific people, it's war on all of the patriarchy.
- 00:35:51 April Host Yeah, it's uh—there's also, I would say, an element to understanding trauma that exists there that, I don't know, I mean like—I can't imagine that Nicholas St. John or Abel Ferrara understood what trauma would be necessarily, but there are scenes that convey it really well, of this kind of all consuming thing that won't let you go.
- There's a scene in a mirror where Thana is looking into the mirror and unbuttons her blouse and then she kind of imagines these man's hands pulling her from her around her ribcage, and she freaks out. It was just a split second kind of thing, but there's a, you know, like this imagined imagery that's coming back at her.
- And there's also the great scene of her coworkers wanting to give her like, "You should sit down, you should sit down, do you want a glass of water?" And she's just like, everything is closing in on her. She can't um, be in the real world in the way that she is right now, because no one will understand.
- 00:36:56 Jenn Guest Right, right. Totally. And there's that moment she like writes, "I just want everyone to leave me alone" on a piece of paper. That's just so like, yeah. She just wants to stop being hassled, by not just men, but like, but all people in society. And I think that that's pretty relatable. Like, sometimes you just need a minute to yourself, you know?
- 00:37:18 April Host It's an interesting thing to depict violence from a, you know, a—coming from different genders for different reasons. This movie seems to be the most successful, but I'm curious if, in your life, in your creative life, you've kind of thought about how *Ms. 45* does it, how other movies do it, and, you know, if certain people perceive violence from a certain gender in different ways?
- 00:37:45 Jenn Guest Yeah, I mean, I really hate, hate, hate vigilante movies where something awful happens to the female character and then she's either raped and incapacitated or she's killed and then it's up to the male character to avenge her. Because then it's his story, and he's avenging her, you know, the thing that was—that happened to her. So, I do like, really appreciate in *Ms. 45* that it's her story. And another movie, more recent revenge, is a great addition to the—
- 00:38:23 April Host Yeah, Coralie Fargeat.
- 00:38:24 Jenn Guest I mean, that's—that's just super smart and also very layered and uh, follows very, you know, looks at the character in a very nuanced way, which honestly that's what we should be doing right now.
- 00:38:40 April Host But what do you see—I mean, there are a large contingent of

people who don't wanna see a rape revenge film. And I think for good reason, because rape has been misused and sensationalized in film before, and trying to convince them to say like, "No, I think this is something new." I mean like, what do you get out of this in particular? I am actually a fan of certain rape revenge films for purposes that sometimes I can't even describe to others, but—

00:39:10	Jenn	Guest	For sure, it's a really hard topic to talk about of course, but I think—and it makes complete sense when people don't want to watch these kinds of movies. Um, but I think, you know, similarly to like, why do people watch horror movies, why do we watch these like, really dark things? It's to like, exorcise our fears. Like, we have to like look at our fears on display so we can like, deal with our anxieties about them. Because the worst thing in my opinion is repression. I think repression leads to like, people acting out and committing violent crimes. I think it's important to look at the thing and deal with it and think about it and deal with it in this healthy way where you're, you know, you're looing at it from afar but you're dealing with it. And um, it can be spoken to for rape revenge movies, but also for horror in general.
00:40:05	Music	Transition	"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:40:06	April	Host	Well, I want to thank you so much for coming in and talking with us about <i>Ms. 45</i> , and can you remind people how they can see your work?
00:40:13	Jenn	Guest	Yeah, for sure. So, <i>The Ranger</i> is on Shutter right now. It's also on Amazon. And um, some films I produced, like <i>Most Beautiful Island</i> and <i>Like Me</i> and <i>Darling</i> are all on various streaming services as well now. Uh, some of them are on Shutter, some on Amazon, and Hulu, and all the others.
00:40:33	April	Host	Everywhere. Just—
00:40:35	Jenn	Guest	Everywhere. Everywhere you stream movies, they're on one of those channels.
00:40:39	April	Host	Thank you so much for coming in.
00:40:40	Jenn	Guest	Thanks so much, April.
00:40:41	April	Host	Thank you for listening to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> ! If you like what you're hearing, please leave us a five-star review on Apple Podcasts.

If you want to let us know what you think of the show, you can tweet at us @SwitchbladePod or email us at SwitchbladeSisters@maximumfun.org.

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.

[Music fades.]

00:41:09	Clip	Clip	<i>[Eerie hissing.]</i>
00:41:13	Speaker 1	Promo	MaximumFun.org .
00:41:16	Speaker 2	Promo	Comedy and culture.
00:41:17	Speaker 3	Promo	Artist owned—
00:41:18	Speaker 4	Promo	—Audience supported.