

00:00:00	Music	Transition	“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. 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.</p> <p>And again, you may already know, a reminder we are remote recording now, and I’m recording in my bedroom. Again, Chicken may scream, the leaf blowers might come out. I’m in Los Angeles, it’s just part of the milieu. The audio is likely going to sound a little bit different from our studios, but everything else is the same, except for also our guest is different.</p> <p>Today, I’m very excited to have writer-director Sonejuhi Sinha. Hi!</p>
00:00:48	Sonejuhi Sinha	Guest	Hi, April. So great to be here.
00:00:50	April	Host	Um, so uh, Sonejuhi is in New York, which is um, you know, it’s its own kind of difficulty right now. But you seem to be doing well. I can see video of you, and you seem bright and glowing and happy.
00:01:06	Sonejuhi	Guest	I’m okay. I’m okay. Yeah, it’s a bit surreal, but we are in the epicenter and it feels like you know, it feels like things are dangerous, but at the same time you can’t see it. So, yeah, it’s a weird, new reality we’re all in.
00:01:23	April	Host	I mean, we’re living in a genre film is the way that I feel. It’s like, all of the worst case scenarios that we’ve been writing about. Cool, alright, wonderful. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:01:32	Sonejuhi	Guest	Exactly. We’re living in a neo-noir.
00:01:36	April	Host	<p>So for those of you who are less familiar with Sonejuhi’s work, please let me give you an introduction.</p> <p>Sonejuhi grew up in Northern India until the age of 13. After a short stint at a British boarding school in the Himalayas, which—that’s not even an entire sentence of this bio. That’s just like, a clause of things that we could go into. Uh, she packed her bags to join her parents in New York City, and got her start working as a commercial film editor.</p> <p>She has edited several commercials for high profile campaigns and one Gold Lions ad-can, working alongside acclaimed directors such as Harmony Korine and Spike Jones.</p> <p>But, long form was calling her, so she produced and edited <i>These Birds Walk</i> and <i>Homegoings</i>, two award-winning documentary feature films that played at South by Southwest, Full Frame, and also True/False, and a bunch of other places, and then garnered</p>

several international awards. But her directing career began with a narrative short film, *Love Comes Later*, which was one of ten short films accepted to the 2015 Cannes Film Festival.

Then she was selected for Tribeca's Through Her Lens program, which many of our guests have been part of that and everyone said it was awesome. She received a development grant from them to further develop her narrative project, *The Quarry*. Now, she is the recipient of the Jerome Foundation development grant and TFI's IWC award for her feature, *Stray Dolls*, a story about one petty crime spiraling into the next.

The film stars Geetanjali Thapa, Cynthia Nixon, Robert Aramayo, and Olivia DeJonge. It recently won a special jury mention for lead performance at Tribeca, and Sonejuhi was named one of Indie Wire's 25 Rising Filmmakers To Know in 2019. Although it's great to know her in 2020 as well.

So, Sonejuhi, the movie that you chose to talk about today is *Drive*. Can you give us a little explanation on why this one might be one of your fave genre films?

00:03:28 Sonejuhi Guest

Yeah. So, you know, um, another female filmmaker once said to me, "Films are more experience and less information," and I think *Drive* is one of the films that completely embodies it. It completely seduces you in. It takes the audience on a ride, no pun—no puns intended.

Um, the visuals you know, work so well with the sound. One of my favorite aspects of the film is Cliff Martinez's score. I think I can watch anything with his score under it, or just whatever he creates. He's such a fantastic composer.

And the visuals are really deliberate and really specific. The color palette, you know, the mise-en-scène, the choreography, the blocking. And it's a classic neo-noir. It's a classic film to example when looking at neo-noir. But however, having said that, there's certainly a few elements that I find infuriating about the film. It's infuriating masculine and sexist, and at times quite empty. I think it falls into some of the clichés and the tropes of the genre as well. But I think it's—it's still a really important film to examine when looking at that genre.

And *Stray Dolls* is a neo-noir, and so *Drive* was an inspiration, but as well as you know, I wanted to really subvert some of the things about that genre as I was creating *Stray Dolls*. So it's an important part of me, but I also wrestle with it sometimes. So we can get into that, for sure.

00:05:06 April Host

Well, I mean this is the place to talk about that. *[Laughs]* So for those of you who haven't seen *Drive*, today's episode will obviously give you some spoilers, but that shouldn't stop you from listening 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 *Drive* first, this is your shot.

00:05:26	Music	Music	[T/N: the show notes are not yet available at the time of transcribing but I'm gonna guess it's the main or central theme of the film score?]
00:05:27	April	Host	Now, let's introduce <i>Drive</i> with a short synopsis. Written by Hossein Amini and directed by Nicolas Winding Refn for release in 2011. <i>Drive</i> stars Ryan Gosling as stunt-driver, getaway driver, the unnamed protagonist we call Driver. We meet him when his boss-slash-manager, Shannon, persuades some Jewish mob bosses to finance a car for Driver to race in.
00:05:48	Clip	Clip	Bernie: What do you got that the big professional race teams don't? Shannon: I got the Driver. Bernie: He just told me they had half a dozen drivers. Shannon: Not like this one. This kid is special. Been working with him for awhile. I've never seen anything like it.
00:06:04	April	Host	Meanwhile, Driver has some new neighbors. Irene, played by Carey Mulligan, and her young son.
00:06:09	Clip	Clip	Driver: I'm not doing anything this weekend, if you want a ride or something.
00:06:18	April	Host	Sparks might fly, but not before Irene's ex, Standard, played by Oscar Isaac, gets home from prison. So, Standard owes money, and gets beat up by a gangster with the ultimatum of robbing a pawn shop to pay his debts.
00:06:30	Clip	Clip	Standard: They want me to rob a pawn shop in the valley. Driver: Why? Standard: 'Cause I owe them some protection money from when I was inside. It's two thousand bucks. And as soon as I got out, oh, it's five thousand bucks. Oh no, actually, it's ten thousand dollars. Twenty thousand dollars. Tomorrow, I don't know what the fuck it's gonna be.
00:06:49	April	Host	Driver, out of concern for Irene and the kid, offers to drive for him, because you know, he's the best and they want it go off okay.
00:06:58	Clip	Clip	Driver: If I drive for you, you get your money. You tell me where we start, where we're going, where we're going afterwards, I give you five minutes when we get there. Anything happens in that five minutes, and I'm yours, no matter what. Anything on either side of that and you're on your own. I don't sit in while you're running it down. I don't carry a gun. I drive. Cook: You look like you're hard to work with. Driver: Not if we understand each other.
00:07:24	April	Host	But the job goes awry. Standard's shot and killed, and Driver takeoff with the gangster's inside person, Blanche, being tailed by a car.

			Blanche admits that they were actually going to re-steal the money.
00:07:36	Clip	Clip	<p>Blanche: He said that there would be another car to hold us up, <i>[Through sobbing]</i> but he didn't say anything about all this money, and he didn't say anything about anyone getting killed.</p> <p>Driver: You were gonna rip us off?</p>
00:07:46	April	Host	And that's kind of a bad omission, because Blanche then gets murdered in a hotel room, because she's an accessory. But Driver escapes after killing someone. This is when shit goes really, really bad. Driver tracks down the gangster, and uh, smashes his hand with a hammer. He tells Driver that the plan was hatched by those Jewish mob bosses who were gonna finance Driver's car.
00:08:07	Clip	Clip	<p>Driver: Whose money do I have?</p> <p>Cook: <i>[Panting]</i> Don't worry. They're gonna come get it.</p> <p><i>[There's a crunching.]</i></p> <p>No, no!</p> <p>Driver: Call them.</p> <p>Cook: Somebody call Nino!</p>
00:08:18	April	Host	They send a hitman after Driver to recover the money. Driver tries to convince Irene to come away with him.
00:08:24	Clip	Clip	Driver: I just thought you could get out of here if you wanted. I could come with you. I could look out for you.
00:08:37	April	Host	In the elevator, however, Driver kisses Irene in a very romantic, slow motion movement, before smashing the hitman's head in with a hammer. The Jewish mafia wants to off anyone associated with that heist, because it would actually lead to the true owners of the money, the Italian mafia, and then back to the culprits, and they don't want the Italian mafia coming into their territory in Los Angeles.
00:08:59	Clip	Clip	Bernie: I'm gonna tell you something. Anybody, <u>anybody</u> finds out you stole from the family, we're both dead.
00:09:08	April	Host	They try to torture Shannon into giving Driver's whereabouts, and he dies. Driver finds his body and goes mad. He dons a rubber mask and tracks one mobster down and drowns him in the ocean. Then, meets the other to give back the money.
00:09:22	Clip	Clip	Bernie: Any dreams you have, or plans, or hopes for your future, think you're gonna have to put that on hold. For the rest of your life, you're gonna be looking over your shoulder. I'm just telling you this because I want you to know the truth.
00:09:37	April	Host	But that mobster stabs Driver, and Driver has to stab <u>him</u> to death. He goes back to the car, wounded, sits in the passenger seat, and breathes, until maybe he isn't anymore. <i>We don't know!</i> <i>[Laughs]</i> It is um, infuriatingly simple and also a very complex plot that

somehow doesn't totally matter, because it's so much more about feeling, as you were talking about.

Um, and I you know, it's also based on a novel, James Sallis' *Driver*. But it's um, Hossein Amiri took a lot of liberties with it to try to make something that was much simpler and more cinematic. We'll get into that later on.

But I wanted to get into something specifically that I think maybe your film might have some parallels with, too. The way that Nicolas Winding Refn was talking about this film in designing it was that he wanted to create a kind of mythological city, so people were saying like, "Oh, this is you know, clearly inspired by *Bullet*," or some other movies like that. And he's like, "Actually, it's kind of more *Grimm Fairy Tales*."

He said, quote, "*Drive* is more born out of the Grimm Brothers fairy tales more than anything else. The book that James Sallis wrote is really great and unique, almost like a script. It's about the adventures within a sort of mythological city, and I wanted the film to feel like a fairy tale that the brothers Grimm would write. It's much more in the vein of that material than anything else." End quote.

So he's talking about a city that doesn't exist, where everyone knows everyone, but they also don't know everyone. You know, it's like it's possible to cross paths with people randomly. And I mean, it's a great kind of pretext for making a crime film, because it complicates you know, who you might meet, who you might run into who would thicken the plot and you know, make some characters make some big choices.

Did you ever think about that in terms of like, creating your kind of ideal city for your script?

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| 00:11:33 | Sonejuhi | Guest | Yeah. Oh, that's so interesting, because I think not only does you know, <i>Drive</i> exist in this mythological city, but also the Driver is somewhat of a mythological hero-like character as well. And I think both those things are kind of important in <i>Stray Dolls</i> as well. <i>Stray Dolls</i> takes place in Poughkeepsie but really it could take place in any—I set it in a place that was like, just outside of New York City, so—where you could—you knew that it was close but it was never close. So mythological in the sense that like, your dream is—you can kind of see your dream, but you can never actually attain it, and— |
| 00:12:15 | April | Host | Yeah. There's almost like an Emerald City quality to that, in the way that like, you exist here and you can see it in the distance, but you may never get there. |
| 00:12:22 | Sonejuhi | Guest | Yeah, and there's an actual metaphor that plays out as well with Niagara Falls. The main character's dream is to go to Niagara Falls and to take her family there, to bring her family to the U.S., and take her family to Niagara falls, and at the end they end up at Niagara falls but we don't really know whether that's her dream or not. |

So there's that mythological um, fantasy playing out as well. The

dreaminess of a dream that is actually not really achieved. And I think Nicolas Winding Refn talks about—he talked about the fact that *Drive*—he wanted to make *Drive* kind of like a dream that turned into a nightmare, and that’s a little bit, at the core of it, the essence of *Stray Dolls* as well. The immigrant dream is not really a dream, it’s now a nightmare.

And so I was sort of playing with those elements as well in *Stray Dolls*, and the fact that Riz is a bit of a mythological hero as well. We don’t know too much about her past. We don’t go into a backstory, or flashbacks. And I was interested in the neo-noir heroes, which are typically so masculine, and they are heroic in this male way. And that was the one thing that I wanted to subvert in *Stray Dolls* and make her a female woman of color lead, to subvert the whole genre.

But um, yeah, so it’s kind of mythological in those—in that duality, but I wanted to play with that specifically with an issue like immigration, and then a lead that we never see in a neo-noir thriller.

00:14:09 April Host

Yeah. I think you know, there’s kind of like a key in terms of longing. You know, like this idea that you’re longing for something, even if it may not exist, you know, that there’s something inherently dramatic about that. And just—I think some great movies use that.

Um, you were talking about your character, who we don’t know much about, and we have you know, Ryan Gosling’s Driver who is you know, a cipher in a sense. And I wanted to bring up this quote that Refn said.

He said, quote, “He becomes what everyone else needs. He represents their inner mirrors. When they need a human being, he’s a human being. When they need a hero, he’s a hero. When Bernie needs his nemesis, he becomes his nemesis. When Shannon—” played by Bryan Cranston, “—needs his dream of buying a car with a driver, he’s his driver. He’s everything to everyone.” End quote.

And I think that’s an interesting thing you know, like when I re-watched the movie with that in mind, he is malleable as a character. He becomes the kind of fantasy that everyone has, and that’s also not something that you see with most characters. You know, like that’s—that’s, I think, it’s a very rare quality. Especially you know, outside of a kind of noir type of sensibility.

But I like that in terms of him supplying other characters with their motivations, as opposed to you know, him having any larger motivations. He just wants to like, do right by some people. That’s it.

00:15:42 Sonejuhi Guest

Yeah. But I think we’ve seen this in the noir genre. It’s very much like the central character is this hero-savior character who is um, inevitably male, and a white male at that. We’ve seen you know, the sort of Clint Eastwood type of hero, or you know, even in films like *Le Samourai*, like Alain Delon type of heroes, and they’re typically white men.

And so—and so that was another part of my question, watching

Drive, like, “Am I ever gonna see—” Like we can all sort of project these different um, emotions into a white male, can we do that to a woman, and can we do that with a woman of color, was my question, as I was looking to sort of subvert the genre and create something new within it.

00:16:31 April Host Yeah, can she be everything to everyone if she is already stereotyped within the world that she lives in? Did you—I mean like, did you find that difficult to convince people that? *[Laughs.]*

00:16:43 Sonejuhi Guest You know, it’s interesting. I think um, you know, I’m—I’m a woman of color and an immigrant filmmaker, and I think if a person like me is out to make a film with a central character that is a woman of color and an immigrant and um, undocumented, I think immediately you start to think that that’s gonna be a certain kind of film and it’s gonna fit into a certain box. And it may be very um, it may be very gritty or documentary style or issue-based or educational or, you know, or—or a film where the audience is—has a sense of pity for the character.

And I wanted to—I knew that box was really small, and I wanted to break out of that box and really question these other elements as well. Like, what if this film is stylistic, what if she is a really flawed character? What if she kind of exists you know, beyond the box of like, either very good or very bad, but somewhere in the middle where we sometimes empathize for her but other times we’re confounded by her actions? And what if she had, uh, starts to take the place of the mythological hero that we’re so used to seeing as typically a white man?

Because it’s—I think it’s also—I think what’s interesting about films like *Drive* is that this white male character can be violent, can be sort of—can do bad things, but yet like, we’re always gonna see him as a hero and as a savior.

But uh, but yeah, I think with people of color, you know, creating characters that are both, that are flawed, that have good and bad in them are rare. I think we’re just sort of stepping into that territory where they can take the roles in the middle and not just like, roles that are very good or roles that are complete criminals. And so I think it’s important to sort of create that dimension and complexity for, yeah, for women and for women of color.

00:18:54 Music Transition “Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:18:55 April Host We’re gonna take a quick break. When we come back, we’ll talk a little bit more about *Drive* and also *Stray Dolls* with Sonejuhi Sinha, and please come back.

[Music fades.]

00:19:09 Promo Promo **Music:** Relaxing ukulele music.

Manolo Moreno: Hey, you’ve reached *Dr. Gameshow*. Leave your message after the beep.

[Music stops.]

[Beep!]

Steve: Hello, this is Steve from Albany, talking about my favorite podcast, *Dr. Gameshow*. *Dr. Gameshow* is a show where listeners submit their crazy ideas for gameshows, and the two hosts have to play them. And they often bring in celebrities and small children to share in the pain and hilarity.

At first it might seem like Jo Firestone has a contentious relationship with listeners, but that is only mostly true. She actually really respects us. It's a lot like *Lethal Weapon*, where Jo, is like, "Aw listeners, you're all loose cannons! You're out of control!" And we're like, "No, Firestone, you're too by the book. You've forgotten what it's like out there."

And that's why I love the show.

[Beep!]

[Music resumes.]

Jo Firestone: Listen to [Dr. Gameshow](#) on *Maximum Fun*. New episodes every other Wednesday.

[Music fades out.]

00:19:56 Music Transition "Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:20:02 April Host Welcome back to *Switchblade Sisters*. I'm April Wolfe, and I'm joined today from New York City by Sonejuhi Sinha. Hi!

00:20:09 Sonejuhi Guest Hi! [Laughs.]

00:20:10 April Host It's nice to come back with you to talk about *Drive*.

Um, so something that was very important to Refn and all of his work is uh, what's behind the acting. He said, quote, "Most of the film was shot with wide angle lenses like *Valhalla Rising* and *Bronson* for that matter. Each movie I want to see the background more than anything else, you know, the framing of an image. I want you to see what's behind the actor, what's going on behind the character action." End quote.

And for him, that's you know, just one part of framing, is having a really, really specific mindset of—of having that depth behind them. That there is like something that they could go to, you know, like this idea that they exist within a world and they aren't just you know, um, apart from it.

00:21:01 Sonejuhi Guest Yeah, I think there's definitely something in all of his work where you can't really come too close to the characters. They either don't have that depth in the script itself, or it's in the mise-en-scène, the sort of um—they're framed in wides, or like you said, almost like this tableau. Like they're a piece of this bigger tapestry. There are very few close-ups in *Drive* as well, and it just keeps all of us at a distance.

And I think what works at least in *Drive*, in a much stronger way than some of his other work, is that—and again, it’s like this mytho—it strengthens this idea of the mythological character even more in this mythical story. It’s almost like a—it’s almost like a fairy tale that he’s um, yeah, that he’s spinning for us, instead of really characters where you can dive in.

‘Cause *Stray Dolls* is a lot of close-ups and I love close-ups. I think it was Cassavetes that said, “There’s no better landscape than the face.” And I really love that. I think—I really love holding on close-ups, and that’s one place where I really deviate from you know, Nicolas Winding Refn’s sort of um, body of work. I love creating moments where there’s no dialogue and we can just sort of move into this character through their face, and really take that.

00:22:31 April Host Mm-hm. Yeah, there’s, I mean, it depends on how comfortable you are as a filmmaker with letting people get to know your characters. And he seems to be like, “You’re not ever supposed to know them.” Which almost feels like, you know, it’s very Danish, in a sense, kind of like a coldness, a closed off of just like—see them where they are, and make judgements from there. But I almost feel like, you know, when you get those close-ups, you are reading the maps to their faces, and you are, kind of, knowing and understanding, and you see those kind of microscopic movements of their muscles in their face. And there’s just so many cues that they’re sending you, that it’s just like, “Oh, I know everything about this person now.”

00:23:13 Sonejuhi Guest Yeah. There are not too many close-ups, except for that one moment where, right after Ryan Gosling bashes the head in at the elevator scene, and Carey Mulligan’s character is on the other side of the elevator, and the door’s about to close. There’s like this close up on Ryan Gosling’s face where he almost looks like a child. And I thought that was really interesting.

Ryan Gosling is such an interesting actor. He’s not like a Christian Bale, like he isn’t a character actor, but he definitely has ways of building nuance with moving very few muscles in his face, and there’s suddenly depth to that whole scene.

00:23:57 April Host Yup. That’s something that also—Refn was just kind of struck by him, and the way that he can use his face without trying. He just has everything set there, especially with his eyes. He was very specifically into that.

He said, quote, “He is a superman. As an actor, he has many talents, but one of the most unique is that he’s one of the few performers who can say a thousand words without saying one word of dialogue. Expressed emotion just pours out of him without even doing anything. Very few people have ever been given that ability, you can count them on one hand.” End quote.

Um, and you know, anyone can say they like or don’t like Ryan Gosling, but he’s—he’s done it in this movie, and he’s done it in quite a few other movies, where you know, I think people actually cut back his dialogue because you don’t need it. *[Laughs.]*

00:24:48 Sonejuhi Guest Yeah no, I think he's—he's, uh—and he's taken some interesting risks in his career as well, and not taken the most expected path. So that's definitely worth respecting.

00:25:00 April Host Yeah, and in fact, you know, the reason that Refn thought that he could actually get this film made—you know, I'll talk about this, because Universal was doing a very kind of *Fast and Furious* version of the movie. Hugh Jackman was supposed to be—yeah, 60 million dollars, and the budget for this movie is 15 million dollars. That's a very slim movie for these—this level of talent. And the fact that like, he was able to make it because he said that he had the protection of his star.

He said, "Ryan insisted on me. What was good in my situation, like Boorman's—" you know, for his *[inaudible]* films "—is that we worked under our own terms, because we were under the complete protection of the star. Without that protection, the film wouldn't have even resembled the one we made. I had a great, first-class experience in Hollywood. I arrived with the mindset ready to fight all the battles, because I had heard all of the horror stories. Maybe not every one of the producers always got what I was saying, but there was always support in the end. And then, once we were done, suddenly there was Cannes." End quote.

00:26:02 Sonejuhi Guest No, I think that's so interesting that, you know, he had done *Pusher* and all these sort of violent genre films, but all in the Netherlands, and not a lot of Americans were aware of him. He had done *Bronson* but yeah, for a star like Ryan Gosling to pick him out and sort of choose him to bring on to direct this movie for Universal is really interesting.

And if you put in the context of what it was suppose dot be, like a *Fast and Furious*, then—then it really—then it really shines from that bar, right? Because you expect these car chases, but there are actually only two car chases in the whole movie. You expect the violence to just start happening from the get-go, but the first really violent scene doesn't come until the first hour, which is also like, you know, the old noir versus the new noirs.

Structurally, in the older noir films, the violence would sort of be slow—it would be a slow burn, simmering plot that sort of led to the first violent—violent act. Maybe in the first hour, um, or so, and there wasn't a lot of violence. And then now it's just about you know, these quick cuts, a lot of technology, a lot of violence, and that's the new genre film, right?

So I really appreciate that it has that slow burn quality, which I really love. I really love sort of building things at a slower pace and like, *Blood Simple* is another one of my favorite noir films, which does that as well. It's like, it just really simmers on this undercurrent of you know, suspense and violence, up until it actually happens.

00:27:50 April Host I wonder, you know, if you're trying to do something where you're prolonging that—that violence and you know, if you get—if you get notes where they're just like, "Well, maybe something should happen every ten pages," that's like, you know? *[Laughs.]*

00:28:03	Sonejuhi	Guest	No, that's so interesting, 'cause I am at the moment, I'm working with my co-writer, Charlotte, who we wrote—we wrote <i>Stray Dolls</i> together. But we're working on um, a TV show that's set in the world of the motel. So the same world as <i>Stray Dolls</i> , which we're so familiar with because the short film was also set in a motel.
00:28:23	April	Host	You guys are like, doing a thing. <i>[Laughs]</i> You're really into this.
00:28:27	Sonejuhi	Guest	We're a bit obsessed with motels at this point. Well, I sort of became obsessed with motels, because sixty to seventy percent of the motels in the U.S. are owned by Indian-Americans, or Eastern European immigrants. And it's such an interesting metaphor for immigrants are resuscitating a foreclosed America.
			Because in the 50s and 60s, the motels were the place to go. That's where middle class American white families would have their vacation, and then they started to go under. And all these immigrants were coming in and they were being discriminated against, so they started to like, buy the motels and revive them. And I just find that fascinating, that they've like, revived this American icon.
			And this American cinematic icon, too, because I find them so cinematic. The color's already there, you don't have to do too much to like, make something noir and have a lot of shadows, have a lot of darkness. And that sort of like, filters into the characters as well inside, because most of the motels are sort of full of outsiders in America anyways.
			And so when I thought about doing a story about outsiders in America, the most cinematic place, inevitably, were the motels. And so yeah, so that's the show. We're creating a show now that's also gonna be set in a motel, and the pace of it is—is different from a feature or a short, and those are exactly the conversations we're having of like, not having everything happen in the first ten minutes, but how to like, slowly simmer conflict and reveal character and build character slowly, so that like, by episode three, there's a moment of big violence. And it's completely justified, it's earned, and it's um, you know, we're really with the character as we get to that point.
00:30:19	Music	Transition	"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:30:22	April	Host	Um, we're gonna take another break. When we come back, we'll get further into <i>Drive</i> , and then also into <i>Stray Dolls</i> and maybe some more of the motel show. <i>[Laughs]</i> So, please come back and join us.
			<i>[Music fades.]</i>
00:30:37	Promo	Promo	Music: Cheerful banjo music plays in the background. Biz Ellis: Hi! I'm Biz. Theresa Thorn: And I'm Theresa.

Biz: And we host *One Bad Mother*, a comedy podcast about parenting.

Theresa: Whether you are a parent or just know kids exist in the world, join us each week as we honestly share what it's like to be a parent.

Theresa: I don't know how to fix mornings for myself.

[Biz laughs as Theresa continues speaking.]

I do not know how to make mornings okay for myself.

Biz: So the t-shirt, "I don't do mornings", isn't even a funny shirt.

Theresa: No.

Biz: I shouldn't get it for you.

Theresa: It's sad.

Biz: It's a sad shirt.

Theresa: Yeah. It's a sad shirt with tears flowing.

Biz: So join us each week as we judge less, laugh more, and remind you that you are doing a great job.

Theresa: Find us on MaximumFun.org, on Apple Podcasts, or wherever you get your podcasts!

00:31:22 Music

Transition

"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:31:29 April

Host

Welcome back to *Switchblade Sisters*. I'm April Wolfe, and I'm joined today by Sonejuhi Sinha, from New York City, and we are talking about *Drive*.

So, let's get into something that we've kind of talked about a little bit, but haven't gone into detail yet. So, Nicolas Winding Refn said about cutting out dialogue, quote, "When I handed out the shooting script, about a week before we started shooting, it was like, 81 pages. By the time I was done shooting, it was like 60 pages. I just kept taking out dialogue, all because Ryan had a really good perspective. He said it would be interesting if the Driver doesn't talk unless he's asked something specific." End quote.

That's a lot of pages to be taking out. In the meantime, Hossein Amini was living with Nicolas Winding Refn, along with um, Ryan Gosling, Carey Mulligan, um, Refn's entire family, um, and the editor. And so Hossein was in the attic writing the entire time, and he would come down and be like, "Okay, this is what I have," because they were making changes so, so fast. But he was you know, cutting out the fat, constantly, on set, like, "We don't need this, we don't need this."

Which is funny, because I think a lot of people will end up doing that

more in post production than they are doing in the moment, because I think the impulse is to want to get things so you might have options. But he's actually removing options away from them, which may or may not make the editing easier.

But I want to get your thoughts on that, and the kind of rearranging of a script in the moment when you realize that uh, you have too much, or you have too little, or anything in between.

- 00:33:07 Sonejuhi Guest Well, I think first of all, *Drive* could have probably lost even more dialogue than—*[Laughing]* than they did cut out.
- 00:33:13 April Host Make it a silent film! You know?
- 00:33:15 Sonejuhi Guest Just because like, you know, Nicolas Winding Refn is so fantastic at doing mise-en-scène, at doing the sound, and it's all so evocative that it actually speaks in much more volume than the dialogue does on the script. Um, but anyways, that's another story.

I, yes, I agree with just cutting and slashing as much as possible. I mean, coming from you know, a decade of editing as an editor, I sort of have—I don't really have a preciousness for holding stuff. I was cutting on set and cutting dialogue all the time. And then in the edit, we actually took out like 15 scenes or something like that. We chopped off like 40 minutes of the film, and I think still, watching it, I think it could have been even—even tighter. We could have lost another 8 minutes.

Um, but uh, I do think like, less is more, and if a silent image can say you know, something much more than like, three pieces of dialogue, then use that. I really love silences in films, and that's—that's one thing that I—that I love about *Drive* as well. There are moments that are quiet—really quiet, and really silent. Especially for like, a genre film.

But yeah, we were—we were cutting on set. We were cutting in the editing room. I think because it was my first feature, I did come from this mindset that you know, that I might as well get everything I can while I'm here for 21 days. So I think I was a bit less ruthless in cutting stuff on set, but I know for my second feature, I probably would be cutting much more.

And I am usually editing in my head as I'm shooting as well. I bring that editorial eye on set, which I think helps. I'm usually trying to cut the scene three different ways, and shape it, shape the emotion and shape the performance in—in a range. And when I feel like I have that range, I move on, as opposed to laboring something out until the cows come home.

So yeah, that editing process is—is I think key, and it comes from experience. And the more you're on set the more you know what you can lose.

- 00:35:36 April Host Yeah, 'cause you've spent like, another lifetime wishing that maybe a director had gotten a shot that you need to cut something together. *[Laughing]* My husband is an editor and so I hear that

quite a bit.

- 00:35:51 Sonejuhi Guest Yeah, I mean the number of times I had a conversation with a director to get a certain shot, or make a shot list for them, or you know, just tell them that what you shot is actually useless, we needed a close-up.
- [April laughs.]*
- I can't even—I can't even count those moments. But um, it's definitely an asset, taking it on on set.
- 00:36:12 April Host I would love to talk a little bit about the low budget and locations, because you already brought it up, so I want to get further into this. Because there's specific rules that Refn seems to have when he's working on low budget.
- He said, quote, " Ryan drove me around, mostly at night, and showed me all of the locations in the book. Based on these night drives, I basically decided where I wanted to shoot. I didn't have the option of using a lot of locations, and we had six-and-a-half weeks to shoot the movie, so I had to be very specific. I used my low-budget formula, which is to choose three main locations. In this case, it was Downtown, the Valley, and Echo Park. I didn't know any of these places, but I came to know them very well before shooting. We would go back to them again and again. We made a point of living near them as well." End quote.
- So for him, it's like the key of just like, the magic three. Well, you don't have much money, so here are your specific geographical spots, and then each one has a certain kind of emotion or feeling or something attached to it. Weather it's like, a character's spot, or a um, or a specific kind of story-turning moment.
- 00:37:20 Sonejuhi Guest That's interesting, because we only had three locations as well. Um, yeah, I mean the script was 90 pages, 80 pages, we're in a motel, and I specifically constructed a story where a lot of it took place in one location, so that I could really galvanize the time with my actors and spend time on performance. I really wanted to focus on that.
- Um, so 80 pages we were just at the motel, which was, you know, efficient and cheap and easy for the crew. Um, and then we had two other locations, which we traveled to. But I think it's so important to be efficient with um, you know, with your budget. Or at least like, by efficiency I mean knowing what's important to you. Like, for me it's performance, um, and getting to you know, work with this cast and really um, saying something about outsiders in America.
- That was like, the core of it, and I think if you know what the core essence of your story is, then you can get rid of some of the bells and whistles. Like, "Oh, we don't need you know, the steady cam for four days. We can do it for two days and be done." And so we cut out a lot of that extra noise, and then we allocated that money more specifically towards nailing story elements and nailing character and the things that were important.

00:38:47 April Host Um, you brought up how long your script is and the kind of paring it down to that particular um, emotions that you need. But Refn has this opinion about um, 90 minute movies, and I wanted to bring this up because I'm curious. I have a very similar opinion. I think it, you know, it makes sense.

Quote. "The script is 80 pages. It's all about getting to the point. 90 minutes is our dream cycle. It's a great pulp length. A great length for noir and classical Hollywood. I don't know why the 90 minute length interests me, but all of my films are around that running time. I also like short novels and fast songs. On the other hand, I don't have a short attention span, to the contrary. I used to play with Legos a lot, and I still do, so I can spend a lot of time looking at something. I actually want to exercise as much control as I can over my material, and my calculation is that the shorter and more compact the material is, the better I can control it. It then becomes more about it and less about me." End quote.

Um, I think that last part might be the key. You know, like sure, sure, like, you know, our dream cycle is 90 minutes. I don't know. Like, maybe it's a biological impulse that we have that like, we want these very specifically timed movies. But I think about him being able to exert control over a movie makes sense, especially if he's working on lower budgets, but it becoming more about the movie and less about him makes sense to me.

00:40:11 Sonejuhi Guest Mm. No, and I think there's something to the whole dream cycle thing, too. It's—'cause it's the REM cycle, it's 90 minutes. And I've had this—my dad is actually a neurosurgeon, was a neurosurgeon and now is a neurologist, and he observes um, sleep cycles and seizures. Typically when I write, I set alarms for 90 minutes as well, so that—because my attention span will run out. Yeah, so I—so that 90 minute thing, I think there's something to it.

And for *Stray Dolls*, we are in the editing process trying to get it close to 90 as well, and it's 94 minutes at the moment. So there is something to that, but also this whole idea of losing yourself so that um, you let the work shine, and let the story shine, and the characters, is definitely the whole—you know, the most—probably the most important um, thing to take away as a director.

I'm really there for everyone else to do their job, and do it really well, to inspire them all to bring out their best work. It's not really about me at the end of the edits. You know, it's about—it's about the creativity of so many people coming together and—and telling a story together.

00:41:28 April Host I mean, that's funny. That's actually what he said in a quote that I found, where he was just like, "Your job as a director is not to know everything, and to specifically inspire the people around you to do the best that they possibly can."

And you know, I like the idea that doing—doing a movie that's 90 minutes is almost like a sprint, where you don't have too much time to think about it. Or to overthink it, to try to be so creative, or just like, "Oh, and this shot, and this shot, and this shot," where like, it

may not service the story, it may just be making things cooler. As opposed to feeling, what we were talking about before, um, a movie about feeling. And I—I kind of enjoy that.

I want to thank you so much for joining us today from New York, and can you tell people how they can see your work?

00:42:13 Sonejuhi Guest Sure. Thank you for having me. This has been such a blast. Um, *Stray Dolls* is out on Amazon Prime and iTunes and [inaudible] and all kinds of streaming platforms. So, I hope you guys can check it out.

00:42:26 Music Transition “Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:42:27 April Host Awesome. Thank you so much.

00:42:29 Sonejuhi Guest Thank you so much.

00:42:30 April Host And thank you for listening to *Switchblade Sisters*!

We’ve been doing something a little different. I’ve been giving a recommendation of a film directed by a woman at the end of every episode. I do try to theme them. Hopefully you guys have some time to check this one out.

This one is Alice Winocour’s thriller, *Disorder*. Um, it is starring the actor who I love, who I have such a hard time pronouncing his name. But it’s Matthias Schoenaerts. Um, I love him in this movie, and it is really kind of sensitively directed.

It’s about a guy who has PTSD, who is protecting this woman who is the wife of a mobster, and it’s uh—the woman is played by Diane Kruger, whom I also love. And the film is just beautiful in terms of sound design, editing, all of that. It’s gorgeous, and I love seeing what a thriller, like a crime thriller directed by a woman is, when a man is the lead subject of it.

But, 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.]

00:43:53 Clip Clip **Cook:** Somebody call Nino!

00:43:55 Speaker 1 Promo MaximumFun.org.

00:43:58 Speaker 2 Promo Comedy and culture.

00:43:59 Speaker 3 Promo Artist owned—

00:44:00 Speaker 4 Promo —Audience supported.

