

00:00:00	Jesse Thorn	Promo	<p>Hey folks, it's Jesse, the founder of MaxFun. Since we postponed our annual MaxFunDrive in mid-March, we have gotten a lot of questions about if and when we'd be rescheduling it. And honestly, we've been asking ourselves the same thing! Well, now we have an answer for you. The 2020 MaxFunDrive will start on July 13th . That's coming up soon. We decided to have the Drive now because it's always brought a lot of joy and excitement to our community and certainly to us. And to be totally honest, it's also the main source of income for some of our hosts.</p> <p>Like pretty much everything right now, this year's drive is gonna be a little different. Uh, we'll still be bringing you very special episodes, fun community activities, premium thank-you gifts; but we also know it's a weird time and, for some folks, a really difficult one. Some people are in a position to become new or upgrading members. Others can't right now. And that is okay. We'll have ways for you to support MaxFun at every level, including some ways that won't cost you anything.</p> <p>We're also gonna run the Drive for four weeks instead of two. We didn't think it was a good time to be rushing anybody and, uh, having a longer Drive lets us be a little more low-key in our Drive pitch. It also gives us more time to do fun stuff! Like the weekly livestreams we'll be putting on for charity throughout the Drive. Most importantly, we want the 2020 MaxFunDrive to highlight all the ways we support each other and our communities. We also wanna show how grateful we are to you for making all the work that we do possible. Stay safe. We'll see ya July 13th for the MaxFunDrive.</p>
00:01:34	Music	Transition	<p>"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.</p>
00:01:42	April	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 has influenced their own work in some small way.</p> <p>And, you may already know, we are recording remotely. I'm in my bedroom, so the cat is asleep, I think she should be fine, the birds seem to be gone, so that'll be okay, I hope.</p> <p>So, everything else is basically the same, except for our guest today is different. We have someone I'm very excited to have here. Writer/director Gina Prince-Bythewood, and producer, also. Hi!</p>
00:02:26	Gina Prince-Bythewood	Guest	<p>Hey! And I have two dogs and two boys, so, there may be some organic interruptions, we'll see.</p>
00:02:33	April	Host	<p>Wow, you know, like, it'll just give us a really, kind of like, slice of life detail of what your quarantine is like, you know?</p>

00:02:40	Gina	Guest	There you go.
00:02:42	April	Host	<p><i>[Laughs]</i> So, for those of you who need a refresher on Gina's career, please let me give you that very quickly. So, Gina is an award-winning director/writer/producer who got her start in television writing for <i>A Different World</i>, <i>South Central</i>, <i>Sweet Justice</i>, and <i>Felicity</i>, before she released her breakthrough directorial debut, <i>Love & Basketball</i>.</p> <p>She followed up that romantic classic with authentic character-driven work in the films <i>The Secret Life of Bees</i>, and <i>Beyond the Lights</i>. But, TV came calling again. She'd already been directing episodes of <i>Girlfriends</i>, <i>The Bernie Mac Show</i>, and <i>Everybody Hates Chris</i>, but in 2017, she and her husband Reggie Rock Bythewood served as series creators and executive producers for a ten hour series called <i>Shots Fired</i>, examining the dangerous aftermath of two racially charged shootings in a small southern town. On the TV side, Gina also directed the pilot for Marvel's <i>Cloak & Dagger</i>, starring Olivia Holt and Aubrey Joseph as two teenagers with newly-acquired superpowers.</p> <p>But now, Gina's got another feature coming out. This time for Netflix, so you can stream it at home. It's an action-drama film called <i>The Old Guard</i>, starring Charlize Theron and KiKi Layne. The film is based on the popular comic book series created by author Greg Rucka, and illustrator Leandro Fernandez, and tells the story of four immortal warriors who have safeguarded Earth, when they welcome a fifth to their crew, and also discover that someone is on to their secret. So they've got some uh, planning and work to do.</p> <p>And uh, that should be coming out in July, is that correct? What date?</p>
00:04:15	Gina	Guest	July 10th. Drops globally. Yes.
00:04:19	April	Host	July 10th, globally, on Netflix. And because Gina wants to put her money where her mouth is, she also funds a scholarship for African-American students in the film program at UCLA, her alma mater, where she graduated from, so.
00:04:32	Gina	Guest	Yes, indeed.
00:04:33	April	Host	Um, year in the life, you know. That's just very, uh—you're not tired, right?
00:04:40	Gina	Guest	<p><i>[Laughing]</i> I do actually need a nap. It's been a two year journey with <i>The Old Guard</i>, and uh, I finish next week, finally, in watching the theatrical print, which I'm super excited about. Because in addition to dropping on Netflix, it will get some theatrical and um, I think it's a great way to end the journey, to be able to see it beautifully on the big screen with perfect sound.</p>
00:05:05	April	Host	Yeah, I mean, it's a big movie. And by—I mean big, it's just a lot of big set pieces, sequences, and you know, we'll get into all that later on. But you know, you're one of the few who gets to see a movie in the theater right now. <i>[Laughs.]</i> Oh, so weird!

Gina, the movie that you chose to talk about today is also one that has a lot of big action set pieces, things, and it is *Man On Fire*. And I was hoping you could give us a little explanation on why this is one of your fave genre films, one that sticks out for you.

00:05:36 Gina Guest Yeah, I saw this film in the theater when it came out. Um, I'd always been a fan of Denzel, and anything he puts out is dope, so you know, I'm in the theater for him. The trailer just looked dope. I love action films, but the actions films I identify most with are those um, which elevate the genre. And for me, that was an action drama, and absolutely the emotional template I used for *The Old Guard*.

But what grabbed me so much is the relationship between Denzel's character and Dakota Fanning's character, this beautiful—honestly, I call it a love story, and a love story can have many connotations. For me, this was an absolute love story between you know, this man who wants to die and a little girl who needs love and attention. And again, it's so beautiful weaved throughout. It's what connects me emotionally to it. I'm sobbing at the end.

And again, the performances were so dope in it. Um, it just elevated—elevated the genre.

00:06:42 April Host Yeah, and we're gonna get into a lot of that, especially the kind of process that Tony Scott had working with Denzel and Dakota together, because it's—it's really special, the way that they were allowed to—to vibe with one another, essentially.

Um, but For those of you who haven't seen *Man On Fire*, today's episode will obviously give you some spoilers. 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 *Man On Fire*, this is your shot.

00:07:09 Music Music "Man on Fire Main Title" off the album *Man on Fire: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* by Harry Gregson-Williams

00:07:10 April Host Now that you're back, let me introduce *Man On Fire* with a quick synopsis for you.

Written by Brian Helgeland and directed by Tony Scott for release in 2004, *Man On Fire* stars Denzel Washington as Creasy, a former U.S. marine recon specialist. An assassin, basically. Creasy's an alcoholic but secures work with a wealthy businessman and his American wife in Mexico City, guarding their daughter, played by Dakota Fanning.

00:07:35 Clip Clip **Samuel Ramos:** Your resume's quite impressive. Sixteen years of military experience, extensive counter-terrorism work. I'm surprised anybody could afford you. What's the catch?

John W. Creasy: I drink.

Samuel: How does that affect you?

Creasy: Coordination, reaction time. Top professionals try to kidnap your daughter, I'll do the best I can, but the service will be on par with the pay.

00:07:55 April Host At first, Creasy is standoffish with the girl, Pita, just doing his job. He spirals so badly that he tries to shoot himself in the head, but it misfires. Maybe a sign?

After that, he finds himself becoming a sort of father figure to young Pita. He actually smiles!

00:08:12 Clip Clip **Lupita Ramos:** Creasy... you're smiling.

[Gentle piano music plays.]

Creasy: What?

Pita: You were smiling.

Creasy: No, I'm not.

Pita: You were.

Creasy: No, I wasn't.

Pita: You're not now, but you were.

Creasy: No, you were smiling. I wasn't smiling.

Pita: You were.

Creasy: When?

Pita: Like five seconds ago.

Creasy: I'm not smiling.

Pita: Well, a second ago you were!

Creasy: No, you said five seconds ago. Now that's six. Six seconds ago I was not smiling. Six seconds—

Pita: *[Laughing]* Okay, ten seconds ago.

Creasy: Ten seconds ago, I was smiling. Okay. In the next ten seconds, we'll see who smiles first.

00:08:37 April Host So it is extremely distressing to him when one day, Pita gets kidnapped on the street, while Creasy gets shot while trying to protect her. And then he has to be protected himself from some crooked cops, owned by the kidnapper, dubbed La Vos.

00:08:52 Clip Clip **Daniel Sanchez:** Do you love your daughter, Señor Ramos?

Samuel: Yes. Yes.

Sanchez: Do you want to see her again?

Samuel: Yes, I do, señor.

Sanchez: If your daughter's life is as important to you as it is to me, you will do as I say.

00:09:08 April Host The kidnapppers put a ransom on the girl, and we see a drop-off of ten million dollars go awry when the crooked federal cops, called La Hermandad, ambush and take the money.

00:09:18 Clip Clip **Miguel Manzano:** Those were all policemen. Badged, official cops. Protected by a brotherhood.

Creasy: Brotherhood?

Miguel: A brotherhood called La Hermandad.

00:09:36 April Host La Vos takes, uh—tells the family that Pita is toast. When Creasy gets out of the hospital, finally, he vows to kill every last one of the La Hermandad, and everyone seems to pretty much approve.

00:09:48 Clip Clip **Lisa Ramos:** What are you going to do?

Creasy: What I do best. I'm gonna kill them.

[Electric guitar strums discordantly.]

Creasy: Anyone that was involved, anybody who profited from it, anybody who opens their eyes at me.

Lisa: You kill them all.

00:10:04 April Host By tracking license plates Pita once jotted down in her notebook, he gets to the man who dragged Pita away that day. He tortures and kills him, doing the same to every La Hermandad he gets to, until he reaches Fuentes, who tells him that, yeah, they did steal the money, but there was only 2.5 million in that bag.

00:10:22 Clip Clip **Victor Fuentes:** There was no ten million dollars. There was two and a half in the bag.

Creasy: The ransom was ten million dollars. They put it in two bags, five million in each bag, right?

Fuentes: Two bags, two. But—but one, half paper. The other, only paper.

Creasy: Maybe your men stole it.

Fuentes: Whoever did it took it before the exchange.

00:10:44 April Host So, Creasy confronts the Ramoses, and Pita's father confesses to staging the kidnapping to get ten million dollars of government money, but everything went wrong.

00:10:54 Clip Clip **Samuel Ramos:** I did it! I did it, Lisa! I agreed to the kidnapping! I

did it for us, for the three of us!

- 00:11:05 April Host Creasy leaves him a gun, and the man kills himself. Some journalists helping Creasy then identify who La Vos is, and uh, Creasy then retaliates by kidnapping La Vos' brother.
- La Vos reveals that Pita is actually still alive.
- 00:11:22 Clip Clip **Daniel Sanchez:** I will give you her life for your life in exchange. I will get my life back.
- Creasy:** What life, whose life?
- Sanchez:** The girl's.
- 00:11:32 April Host And that he's willing to trade her for Creasy himself. Creasy agrees. They stage a trade-off. Creasy is able to say goodbye to Pita one last time—
- 00:11:42 Clip Clip **Creasy:** Your mother's waiting for you, she's right at the end of the bridge. Okay? You go home.
- Pita:** [*Whimpering*] Okay. Where are you going?
- Creasy:** ... I'm going home, too.
- 00:11:58 April Host —before he's shoved into a car, and he dies. The policeman who helped Creasy then kills La Vos to end it all.
- That's it, but there's a lot there! There's a lot of process. There's a lot of style. There's a lot of things that you can't really describe just from a synopsis. But, um, I wanted to get into, first off, I mean you can't talk about this movie without getting really in-depth into Denzel Washington and his work as an actor, and then also his work—essentially the types of projects that he chooses and when he chooses to take them.
- So, when Tony Scott was conceiving of this film, he'd already worked with Denzel Washington in *Crimson Tide*. But he was thinking about who he would cast in this role as Creasy.
- And he said, quote, "I started thinking about the cast. And you think, 'Gene Hackman, Robert DeNiro', you know? And then I'm sitting in a doctor's suite, and there's Denzel. I haven't seen him since *Crimson Tide*, and he's wearing acupuncture needles in his knee, and I'm getting a needle in my bum for something else. And I sat and talked with him. I didn't talk with him about the movie, but in talking with him, I said, 'Damn, this is the way to go.'" End quote.
- And I think that's an interesting thing. He could have gone a very easy Gene Hackman thing, and I think I could potentially see Gene Hackman in this role, because he's played, you know, some other, similar roles. Something like *Night Moves* and you know, earlier in his career, all those things. But in casting the person, not the actor, he found his kind of ultimate Creasy. He wasn't looking, you know, just for like, what Hollywood would say who this person is. He's Looking at, first off, who I want to work with again, and that there is

something untapped in Denzel Washington that he wants to get to. Even after *Training Day*.

And for you, you know, like what is that kind of casting process like? Are you—are you in that kind of mood where you want to find someone who is maybe bored with what they're doing, and they want to do something different, they want to expand their roles? Like, how do you approach casting?

00:14:01 Gina Guest Casting is—I mean, I think somebody said it's 70% of directing. And I fully believe that casting is everything, and I cast with my gut foremost. Well, I have four criteria. And uh, you have to have the craft, and that's something that is not always respected in Hollywood, which is surprising.

There's so much of that narrative of, "I've never taken an acting class and it's just all natural," and people celebrate that. But I want people who have trained, because it is a craft, and when the two of us are in trouble in a scene and are struggling to find it, we can both fall upon that craft to figure it out. Um, I need you to be bold, and that means being brave enough to give me all of yourself. Because that's what it takes for a great performance. I need you to be a cool person, that honestly—

[April laughs.]

That could absolutely be the first one. Um, I have a no asshole policy. I had a very bad experience with an actor early in my career and I said I would never go through that again. It absolutely poisons the entire experience. It's too hard. It's too hard to make a film and it's also such a beautiful thing that we get to do. We get to tell stories. We get to create worlds and change perception and change culture. And I want everyone on board to—to want to do that, and be that, and just be respectful. Be respectful of the process, be respectful of the craft, be respectful of your fellow actors. And as I said, never wanted to go through that again, so, you know.

00:15:52 April Host I mean, but like, how do you test people to make sure that they're not an asshole? You—like, you take them out, see if they tip a waiter, or like, what do you...?

[Both laugh.]

00:16:02 Gina Guest No, it's uh, you call around, and I did not do that with this person because he was such a big star, and I loved his work. I was excited. Like, "Oh my gosh, I'm gonna work with this guy." So I didn't, and I didn't think. I was so early in my career, I hadn't dealt with an asshole yet. I didn't know that somebody could be that shitty, you know? Um, so once that happened, any time I was up for a film, I would call around. And I turned down a couple films in hearing about the behavior of a couple of some of our favorites, to be honest.

[April responds with an emphatic "damn!"]

And it takes—it's so important for other directors to be honest. You

have to be. And it's hard, because you don't want your words to get out. You don't—you know, you feel bad about you maybe keeping somebody from getting a job, but to—to have no idea that someone can be that poisonous, it's a terrible way to spend six, seven, eight months. So I'm always honest, and I've been grateful to the people who were honest with me as well.

Um, and then the last criteria is being passionate about this story that we're telling. I want to feel that connective piece that you have, because everything I write and direct, there's a piece of me in it. Even if I haven't written it from scratch. When I take a gig, it's because there was a guttural connection to the material for me, and I want that same with the actors as well. And you get that through conversation in the beginning, so yeah, if you pass those four criteria then we are—we are in it.

00:17:53 April Host

Do you—I mean, once you cast someone—the process that Tony Scott went through as well that, when he fell on that kind of magic person, he would, again, go back into the script and make changes for that actor specifically.

In this case, you had an actor who is African American playing what he thought would be like, a white person. But the—you know, like his default—but the things that they did, mostly when they readjusted for him in the script, for Denzel Washington, had actually nothing to do with race. It just had to do with specifically who Denzel Washington was as a person, and what his strengths were.

And specifically also a kind of—and we'll talk about this too—a spirituality to the character that had lacked that Denzel Washington had brought in, because he was, you know, wanted this guy to have a kind of like, um, you know, a lapsed um, Christian kind of point of view. Kind of like bible-is-warrior type of thing.

So, those were the changes that they made specifically for him as an actor. But that's, I mean, I think that's wonderful when someone can do that. If you can really, really tailor the script to this person and their strengths.

00:19:07 Gina Guest

Mm-hm. You know, it's interesting. For me, uh, given I normally write what I direct, and I spend so much time with the script, you know, a year and a half, two years. Like, I'm directing it every day I'm writing it, I'm hearing it. So, what's exciting foremost is to—to—in an audition is hearing the words and hearing them the way that I pictured it. But even more exciting is when an actor brings things to it I didn't even imagine. That's the most exciting part for me. My hope is that an actor come in to embody this character that I have created so fully in those years of writing that I don't—at least in the world that I've done, I haven't tailored um, it to casting, except for *Beyond The Lights*, and that was because Gugu was British.

[April laughs.]

The character was originally written as American, and she came in and was doing it with an American accent, and once the audition was done I just wanted to have a conversation. And she dropped

the accent and we just talked, and we started talking about her upbringing. And it was just suddenly like this movie is so much about being your true self and authenticity, and I knew that Gugu was the one, and I was like, “Why not let her be her true self in this film?” And so—and in making those changes, I thought it made it a better film, to be honest. So, in that case, that was a pretty big tailor. But for the most part, I’m hoping that an actor—I see the character in the actor, and then it becomes this balance of pulling even more of that out on set.

00:20:57	Music	Transition	“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:20:58	April	Host	Um, we’re gonna take a quick break. When we come back, we’ll talk a little bit more about <i>Man On Fire</i> and also uh, some of Gina’s long history in movies and TV shows. We’ll be right back. [Music ends.]
00:21:14	Promo	Promo	Music: Mellow synth piano plays in background. Brea Grant: Readers have a lot of problems! Mallory O’Meara: How do you juggle your holes at the library? Brea: How do you decide what to read next? Mallory: What do you do when you find out an author you love is a <u>huge</u> trash baby? Brea: I’m Brea Grant. Mallory: And I’m Mallory O’Meara. Brea: And we’re the hosts of <i>Reading Glasses</i> . Mallory: We’re here to solve all your reader problem, and along the way, help you figure out— Brea: —your reader wheelhouse. Mallory: Which are the things that will absolutely make you pick up a book. Our listener favorites tend to be “magic” and “a woman on a journey”. Brea: And also “birds” for some reason! Mallory: Your reader <u>doghouse</u> . Brea: Yeah, that’s the things that will make you avoid a book. Mallory: Ugh, “love triangles” stress me out so much. <i>Reading Glasses</i> . Brea: Every Thursday on MaximumFun.org .
00:21:55	Music	Transition	“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:22:01 April Host Welcome back to *Switchblade Sisters*. I'm April Wolfe, and I'm joined today by Gina Prince-Bythewood, and we are talking about *Man On Fire*.

Uh, so I think maybe one of the things that people notice first off about *Man On Fire* is the very kind of frenetic energy that Tony Scott is bringing to this, which kind of marks a new period of his filmmaking. You know, people call it like, his dream period, 'cause he's doing a lot of experimental processes on his films. But, you know, Denzel Washington was asked uh, really often if the kind of choppy style of this film was difficult for him as an actor.

And he said, quote, "It actually helps because what he does is the setups take longer because he's setting up 4 cameras, usually, three to four cameras minimum. The advantage to that is he'll shoot a master and a closeup at the same time. So you feel a freedom, as an actor. Whatever you're doing, he's gotta get it. If it's something really good, you don't have to try and repeat it. he's going to grab honest moments when they happen. And I like to improvise, and ad lib, so he was capturing a lot of those moments.

"What got tagged onto that was the reverse process film, and he cranks it so basically your dialogue's not going to be any good. I think we kind of fell into a rhythm of getting the scene with those four cameras, or whatever amount of cameras we use, getting the coverage, and then moving into a particular set-up the last set-up would be to hand crank things just to get it, or this other thing we call—" and I've seen pictures of this. "This other thing that we call the vomit comet, which would just spin around." End quote.

Have you seen the pictures of them getting directed on the set?

00:23:42 Gina Guest No. I've got to see that.

00:23:44 April Host Because it's like, there's like a few videos that you can find, but like, Denzel Washington is basically like, on a merry-go-round. *[Laughs]* And then there's the cameras on the other end, and they're just like, spinning him around.

[Both laugh.]

Like, back and forth.

00:23:58 Gina Guest That goes to the trust, you know? Absolutely, for him to—you know, 'cause it sounds crazy, but you have to believe you know, "I'm on this thing that's inducing vomit, but I believe it is the best thing for the film and that Tony's gonna use it in the right way."

00:24:13 April Host Yeah. And you know, having a sense of humor that you can call it a vomit comet and be like, "Well, it's my job. That's what it is. We just get on this and we film it." But I think it's fascinating, what he's saying about the multi-camera setup. Um, we've talked about, on the show before, that it's a luxury to have, you know, sometimes more than one camera. Um, but the greatest part that you get from it is that seamless you know, ad-libbing, the improv that you get, and the kind of genuine emotion. Because it's so hard to kind of nail

that on first, second, third.

Um, and I think here you can see it specifically in that great scene where they're, for instance, talking about the smile. And you know, that like, Denzel Washington's like, saying that like, "I'm not smiling." And she's just like, "You're definitely smiling." And I think that that's a really, really lovely moment, and it probably would not have come off the same if they hadn't had four cameras going simultaneously, to be able to catch that master um, and then the closeups at the same time.

You come from a multicam world. 'Cause when you started on *A Different World*, you were writing for multicam stuff. So, you know, which is also great for comedy, because you're getting the reaction, the joke, everything at the same time, and hopefully they can, you know, cut all together. Is that something that you miss? *[Laughs]* Is that something that you like, wish that you had more of in your life, or...?

00:25:43 Gina Guest Um, well I have to say I do—I completely get what Tony and Denzel were talking about and going for. Because, when you're shooting four cameras, or even three cameras, you are able to capture those special moments that you don't have to, then, suddenly try to recreate on the other side when you're quote-unquote "turning around". It's impossible, almost, to recreate that.

Um, but in having, definitely, two cameras when you have a scene with two people, and um, the actors like to try different things, it does, I think, give them more courage to do that, and more freedom to do that, because you know it's getting captured on both sides, and um, I love it.

It's gonna be hard to go back, you know, with—you know, my earlier films, I never had more than two cameras, and sometimes, you know, I could only have two on certain days, um, that's all we could afford. Where, this one, it was always at three cameras, and then a lot of times, four.

00:26:54 April Host Because you're doing a lot of action, so.

00:26:55 Gina Guest Yeah, a lot of action, but I brought it to the intimate scenes, as well. Which is great, because also, as you were saying, you can get that close up and the two-shot, and I always love to get just an interesting angle as well. To be able to get all that, and the actors know they don't have to do take after take after take, because I'm gonna keep the camera running.

I mean, I do cut in my head a lot but, to have the freedom to be more creative as a director, because you know, and the actors know that they're not gonna have to do a ton of takes for me to get what I want creatively, it's really a beautiful thing. I mean, certainly then for action, of course, you have to have that many cameras because you only have a couple shots at it, so capture it in as many cameras as you can.

00:27:42 April Host Yeah. I think Tony Scott was also saying that, for him, it was great

because, you know, the improv that he was doing was with a child. And, the kind of like, almost chaotic energy of a kid, where you're just, like, "What are they gonna say?" I mean, there's entire TV shows based on that, like, what are kids gonna say? So, um, for him, it was the extra freedom of just being like, "Okay, if I'm working with a kid, I can capture these great moments."

He said, quote: "Three quarters of the smiling scene was off script. Once she said 'You're smiling,' it went off from there. That's one take. I used two cameras, and I knew it was good. This was the second take that we did. Dualing cameras enables you, when you're doing a movie about emotion, not having an actor repeat the performance. It's really hard to capture a second time around of emotion." End quote.

And, you know, it's basically what you're saying, this—there's a kind of a built intimacy in that process.

00:28:35 Gina Guest

Oh yeah. And also, I was blessed to be able to work with Dakota on *The Secret Life of Bees*, and her talent is surreal. I worked with her when she was 13. Um, and you know, again, my love for her work was built from *Man On Fire*, and seeing her in that, and I don't know where her talent comes from.

But, to see her performance at ten, and yeah, I read that also so much of that scene was improvised, but that's such a beautiful thing, because that also says that these are two actors—again, it's Denzel and a girl who is that young having the ability to be so tuned into their characters, that they can go off on an improv, and have it be real, and true to their characters, and emotional. Like, those are the beautiful moments that you're chasing as a director.

[April agrees.]

I mean, for me, I feel like, when my mind's set, I'm chasing the perfect take, and that it's so exciting when you actually see it, and to be able to have the freedom of just let the cameras run, and let actors who are so in tune with their characters that it just comes, I mean, it's a beautiful thing.

00:29:49 April Host

Yeah, the other thing I thought was really interesting about this, and I'm curious what you found on your side that's working with Dakota or otherwise, that um, Denzel Washington became a kind of, um, you know, godfather to her on set. And, really, really became a kind of second parent to her, in like the process of making that. Or just, like, he just cared for her so much.

So you have these kinds of senior actors really taking these younger actors under their wing, and hopefully making it a pleasant experience for all involved. Because otherwise, you know, younger actor, it could go very awry. They're not as experienced, and—but it's just a—it was a very sweet process for them.

00:30:37 Gina Guest

I mean, it certainly happened on my first film with Alfre Woodard—Alfre Woodard is the queen. And uh, she was also, honestly, a mother figure to Sanaa, and also to me, I mean, it was my first film, I

was scared to death to talk to Alfre in the beginning, like, how am I going to direct her? How am I going to tell her how to do her job?

So, um, I was petrified, and she broke through that, and she was so helpful, so giving, so great, um, I just learned so much from her, and the relationship that she built with Sanaa, obviously it's mother/daughter onscreen, but it was certainly that as well, and uh, you know, just different scenes where I saw Alfre helping me as a director by helping to pull things out of Sanaa. And so, to see that, as you said, if you don't have that organically, you can go really wrong, you know and that's why again, it's so important to do your due diligence, and make sure that everyone on set are good people.

Because, you do want that harmoniously, and what if Denzel was an asshole? He could have damaged Dakota. And so, it's good to hear that, and as you said earlier, there is a reason why directors worked with the same people, and it's because you start to form a collective of folks who you know respect the process, respect you, are great actors, and make the process fun.

00:32:10 Music Transition "Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:32:16 April Host We're gonna take another quick break, when we come back we're gonna talk a little bit more *Man On Fire*, and also some more Gina stuff, we'll be right back.

[Music ends.]

00:32:27 Promo Promo **Speaker 1:** *[With crackling and static, as though speaking through a walkie-talkie]* Rocketship One, this is Mission Control. Come in.

Speaker 2: *[Similar crackling and static]* This is Rocketship One! Go ahead!

Speaker 1: Rocketship? What's your status on MaxFunDrive? Shouldn't we have seen it by now?

Speaker 2: Sorry about that, Mission Control. Turns out I miscalculated.

[Beeping noises.]

Speaker 2: Current projected ETA for MaxFunDrive is...

[Computer beeps.]

Speaker 2: —July 13? But it looks different. It'll be for...

[Quick beep.]

Speaker 2: —four weeks. So it's longer than expected. But all readings point to—

[Quick beep.]

Speaker 2: —low-key?

Speaker 1: *[Sound of keyboard clacking in background]* Oh! That will be good. But can you verify that there are still special gifts for new and upgrading monthly members?

Speaker 2: Verified. Sweet gifts for new and upgrading members, plus amazing new episodes and even special weekly livestreams for charity.

Speaker 1: Copy that! Rocketship, can you confirm ETA for MaxFunDrive?

Speaker 2: Mm, 90% probability of MaxFunDrive from July 13 to August 7.

Speaker 1: Did you say... 90%?

Speaker 2: There were a couple of decibel noises and I might've carried a zero wrong...

Speaker 1: I—I'm just gonna pencil in July 13 to August 7. Mission Control out.

[Sound of crackling communications device.]

00:33:33 Music

Transition

“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:33:39 April

Host

Welcome back to *Switchblade Sisters*, I'm April Wolfe, joined today by Gina Prince-Bythewood about *Man On Fire*.

So, one of the things that you were bringing up to is that, um, the way that he uses *City of God* as an influence, but then reinvents, um, these textures for his own style, his own look, so you can see the basis of *City of God*, but then you only see Tony Scott when you see the final project. So, I wanted to talk a little bit about his editor. Christian Wagner worked with him on a bunch of stuff, and the way that he treated working with Tony Scott was that they were experimenting every day of their career together.

So, for this one, he said, quote: “We treated that film as if it were a science experiment. What could we do on any given day? Tony spent six months researching film stocks, and as usual, he pulled from his previous experiences. On *Spy Game*, he wanted each era to have a different visual signature, and the idea with *Man on Fire* was to make something that had its own unique visual identity which felt bold, and uncompromising. He and Paul Cameron were using 16 millimeter hand crank cameras, and they shot over 2 million feet of film while in production.

“We were transforming the footage on a daily basis, as Tony wanted the film to have a roughed up, 9 Inch Nails aesthetic. I had to throw away every lesson I had ever learned about editing while I was cutting *Man On Fire*. Like JFK, and some of the stuff that Oliver Stone had already done, we went for something nonlinear, and avant-garde. Being normal just wasn't going to cut it. And Pietro

Scalia and Joe Hutchins are heroes of mine, so this was my chance to do something along their lines, too.” End quote.

Two million feet of film in production.

00:35:31 Gina Guest I can't even fathom that. What I love about what you just said is that his relationship with the editor and, again, the fact that they were in this together really—is a partnership, certainly your DP, but also editor, and how important that is. And, you know, the fact that there is a vision, and that they're gonna figure it out together, and how important that relationship is.

When I think about my editor, Terilyn Shropshire, who's cut every single thing I've done, except for *Disappearing Acts*. So that's features, and that's pilots, and that's short films. Um, you know, wedding video.

[April bursts out laughing.]

She's done all of it. And—

00:36:20 April Host Birth video! Wedding video! Anniversary party!

00:36:25 Gina Guest So, you know, you build this trust between you, and you wanna push each other. Um, which is what I love, like, I'm still learning as a filmmaker. And I wanna be pushed, and I wanna grow, and I wanna try things, and you need a partner in that, you've got—can you imagine if Tony Scott having these ideas, and having to edit? That can't work, that's never been done, I don't understand this. Yeah.

Like, you can't—you want someone to be as excited about trying it as you, and certainly the relationship that I'm lucky enough to have, and, you know, for to dig here about that—I mean, again, when I set *Man On Fire*, I mean, I hadn't uh, seen it before. That was what was so exciting, not only am I feeling so much, because I love the story so much, and the story kept surprising me, and I didn't see the twist coming in the film. But visually, it was, like I was just sitting back like this in my seat, it just felt so full. And, the camera never stopped moving, and normally, for me, that can be annoying.

But here, it wasn't, because it fed into the urgency of the situation, and the tension, that you knew that Peter was gonna get jacked, you knew it was gonna happen, you just didn't know when, and so there was always this tension and urgency, and the camera absolutely fed into that in the way that it was shot, and the different film stocks.

It was just—your eyes just never stopped taking everything in, and you're just always looking at every element of the screen, and it kind of puts you into the world of what Denzel was going through. An amazing way of the camera being able to help you tell the story, as opposed to distracting you from the story.

00:38:15 April Guest Yeah. I, you know, I think, also—you were talking, to bring it back to having someone who was not going to say no, who's gonna be your partner on this, we'll cover that first. Because the thing that Christian

Wagner was saying, was that they knew how to argue together already.

And he said, quote: “The first cut of *Man On Fire* wasn’t nearly as stylish. Tony would keep coming in and saying, ‘Let’s try this,’ and we basically cut that entire film together. He was with me every step of the way. It was a complete collaboration. There were many heated days and nights while working on that movie, but how can that not have been the case?”

“We were making an acid trip of a film, with flash forwards and every trick you can think of, and the great thing is our creative fights, they’d end 30 seconds after they started, because it was always about the work, and doing something sensational for people. Tony had a shoot-from-the-hip mentality, which I always loved and respected” End quote.

That’s another, like, that’s what you want in a romantic relationship, and a professional relationship.

[Gina laughs.]

How to fight, and how to fight healthy.

00:39:20 Gina Guest It’s very important, and again, the fact that I have been with the same editor for my first film to now, this big, giant film, the fact that we got to take this journey together, um, is so beautiful. Especially as female collaborators. You know. Very few women get the opportunity to do an action film. Very few females editor get this opportunity. And then put on top of that, black female director, black female editor, this is the first. I’m the first, she’s the first, and to be able to do it together.

And knowing that we got here because we’ve trusted each other for 20 years now, and that we make each other better, you know, it’s a blessing, and I’m excited. I’m excited for her, that she is now on those elusive lists. I hate that, though, because God help me if she takes another film, and I get my green light, then we’re gonna have to fight for real.

[April laughs.]

But—

00:40:27 April Host She will never abandon you.

[They both laugh.]

But it’s, I mean—it’s true, though. I think that some people don’t realize how rare it is to find a black woman who has directed an action film. Because if you look, it’s you. And then you know, Vic Mahoney is probably going to be on that list. Very, very shortly.

00:40:47 Gina Guest Vic just got hers. I’m super hype for Vic. Her movie sounds dope, for Paramount.

00:40:54 April Host So, I mean, the list is growing, but it—it's pretty small. It's a list of one and a half to two.

00:41:04 Gina Guest But I will say, this year excited me in that—the pandemic has fucked with a lot, but one of the things I was excited about was this did feel like a watershed here for female directors in the big sandbox. There are about five or six of us, it has never happened before, to have this many women doing tentpole movies. And now, everything has had to move off.

Which is just really disappointing, because, as I said, it could be a game changer. Patty Jenkins, I give all praise to, because her success, her making a good film when there was such tremendous pressure on her. Like if she failed, I would not be sitting here. You know, Nikki Carroll probably wouldn't be sitting there, Cate Shortland wouldn't be sitting here, but Patty did it, and did it so well, that suddenly I'm seeing open floodgates, and then you're like, "Yeah, well, it's five." But still! We're going from zero to—!

00:42:03 April Host Yeah! It's still more—so much more!

00:42:07 Gina Guest Yeah, I mean, when the bar is literally on the floor. But, you know, going from zero to five or six, in Hollywood, that is a watershed moment. And uh, I'm just excited for their films to come out. Because I love the aesthetic that we bring, I love—when you look at Patty, the way Patty shot *Wonder Woman*, shot Gal, as opposed to the way that Gal was shot in Jesse's league, tells you everything you need to know about the difference between the female and the male gaze.

I was offended, like, pissed at the way that Gal was shot. All these shots from down low, from behind, like, what are you doing? With Patty, she was always heroic.

00:42:55 April Host Yeah, it's not always evident to some people, unless you see them side by side, and then you're like, "Oh!" Yeah, I think I know what you're talking about, like I don't like to think in terms of dichotomies, but there is such a thing as a female gaze, and a male gaze, and it's like, *[Audibly shudders.]*

I want to thank you so much for coming on the show, and talking to us about *Man of Fire*, and your new film, *The Old Guard*, and again, people can see it on Netflix, um, July 10th, correct?

00:43:20 Gina Guest Yes.

00:43:21 April Host Keep a lookout for *The Old Guard*, and thank you so much for joining us today.

00:43:25 Gina Guest Thank you very much.

00:43:26 April Host And thank you for listening to *Switchblade Sisters*.

you know, we've been doing something a little different at the end of each episode, I've just been giving a staff pick of a recommendation of a film directed by a woman. Any film! Any woman! So the woman that I am recommending today is actually one that is tangentially

related to some of the things that Gina and I were talking about, because Alfre Woodard is in it, and it's one of her best performances, I'd say, um, you know, in her entire career.

It is from Chinonye Chukwu's *Clemency*. For some reason, that movie kind of flew under the radar of award's voting bodies, but it's a complex morality tale about a Black prison warden who's buried her conscience over the years by executing multiple prisoners, until the sins of her past just kind of rise to the surface, and begin to torment her. She's got something different she has to deal with in this one.

Um, it's a film where you look at this lead performance, and you wonder how the hell people weren't talking about this constantly. And of course, if you're on film Twitter, or involved in that, you probably heard people talking about it. But in the larger world, it is a huge missed opportunity for people to see, you know, what acting is. So please check that out, you can rent it pretty much anywhere right now.

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.]

00:45:13	Clip	Clip	Samuel Ramos: I did it!
00:45:15	Speaker 1	Promo	MaximumFun.org .
00:45:17	Speaker 2	Promo	Comedy and culture.
00:45:18	Speaker 3	Promo	Artist owned—
00:45:19	Speaker 4	Promo	—Audience supported.