

00:00:00	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>
00:00:08	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, recording in my home office with special guest appearances from my cat, Chicken, and the wild parrots next door.</p> <p>Every week, I invite a new female filmmaker on. A writer, director, actor, or producer, and we talk—in depth—about one of their fave genre films. Perhaps one that’s influenced their own work in some small way.</p> <p>And today, I’m very excited to have writer, director, actor Isabel Sandoval. Hi!</p>
00:00:34	Isabel Sandoval	Guest	<p>Hi, April. Thank you so much for having me on.</p>
00:00:37	April	Host	<p>Lovely to see you. Um, for those of you who would like a little refresher on Isabel’s career, let me give this to you now.</p> <p>Isabel is a Filipino U.S.-based filmmaker, who has written and directed three features. Her first, <i>Señorita</i>, debuted in 2011, competing at the Locarno Film Festival, and followed the story of Donna, a trans sex worker who gets the chance to leave that life behind, with a job caring for her friend’s child. Only, when Donna arrives at her new gig, she finds that her old life has followed her unexpectedly and in devastating ways.</p> <p>From there, Isabel directed <i>Apparition</i> in 2012, about a cloister of reclusive nuns in the Philippines, whose search for peace is put to the test when President Marcos declares martial law. That film competed in the new current section at the Busan International Film Festival, and is seen as a modern classic, alongside the works of other Phillipino filmmakers, like Lav Diaz and Brillante Mendoza.</p> <p>Now, Isabel’s third feature is called <i>Lingua Franca</i>. Co-starring Eamon Farren, and telling the story of sexual awakening and empowerment through a young immigrant caregiver in Brighton Beach, whose quest to get a green card is put in peril when she falls for the wrong type of man.</p> <p>The film has played at festivals around the world, but premiered at Venice, making Isabel the first trans woman director to compete there. <i>[Adopting a prim tone]</i> Groundbreaking.</p> <p><i>[Isabel laughs.]</i></p> <p>So, Ava DuVernay’s Array is releasing that film, and it’s available to watch on Netflix in the U.S.</p> <p>Isabel is currently developing her fourth feature, <i>Tropical Gothic</i>, a</p>

sixteenth-century surrealist drama about the haunting of a Spanish conquistador. And in September, Indiana University will present an early career retrospective of Isabel's work as part of the Jorgensen Guest Filmmaker series.

So, you've been busy. Um, Isabel, I can see some kinds of parallels between you and the filmmaker whose movie you chose today, but I'll tell you guys that the movie that you chose to talk about today is *Double Indemnity*. Can you give us a little explanation on why this one—this is one of your fave genre films?

00:02:42 Isabel Guest So, *Double Indemnity* is really just Wilder's third film. But he approaches it with, you know, such confidence and flair. And at that point, noir was pretty young, as a genre in American cinema. But it feels like, as he executed it, the genre feels like a well—a slick, well-oiled machine in a way. Just because I feel like, for the first time, the tropes and the elements that make noir the genre that it is come together, but also in a way that feels very smart and savvy and clever.

And one thing that I also really like about *Double Indemnity* is that it locates its emotional center on quite an unconventional relationship in the film, which I thought was pretty um, risqué maybe, or maybe not risqué, but it's between two men. Yeah.

00:03:49 April Host Yes, yeah. And it's—I mean, we'll talk about it in the film, too. Just like the capstone, the final, the ending of this—of this movie is just, you realize the love that is there—

[Isabel affirms.]

—and what the story is actually trying to tell. And um, and you know, it's something that a lot of people will say that this movie marks the first actual, real film noir movie. Um, and—and it's a thing where a lot of people think, a lot of people think that um, immigrants to the U.S. really, really made film noir, but the thing is that the vast majority of film noir was actually made by, you know, non-immigrant Americans. It's just that the immigrants *[Laughs]* who made those entries were the ones—like, some of them are the ones that really stood out and kind of took it to a next level.

You know, sometimes you see that in terms of spaghetti westerns, if we're talking about, you know, like—

00:04:48 Isabel Guest

[Inaudible.]

00:04:49 April Host

Yeah, yeah, exactly. People who aren't even immigrants, but people who are just like, outside of the U.S.

Um, so that's all wonderful. We're gonna get into all that. But for those of you who haven't seen *Double Indemnity*, today's episode will give you some spoilers. That shouldn't stop you from listening before you watch. If you would like to pause and watch *Double Indemnity*, this is your shot.

00:05:08 Music Music

"Prelude (Film Version)/ First Scene" off the album *Double Indemnity Soundtrack* by Miklós Rózsa

00:05:11	April	Host	<p>And now that you're back, let me introduce <i>Double Indemnity</i> with a quick synopsis.</p> <p>Written by Raymond Chandler and Billy Wilder and based on a novel by—or, a story by James M. Cain, and directed by Wilder for release in 1944. <i>Double Indemnity</i> stars Fred MacMurray as insurance salesman Walter Neff. We meet him as he records a confession to his friend and mentor, Barton Keyes.</p>
00:05:36	Clip	Clip	<p>Walter: I killed Dietrichson. Me, Walter Neff, insurance salesman, 35 years old. I'm married, no visible scars. 'Til awhile ago, that is. Yes, I killed him. I killed him for money. For a woman. I didn't get the money, and... I didn't get the woman.</p>
00:06:02	April	Host	<p>Neff goes out to a house. You know, we travel back in time. Neff goes out to a house to remind a rich guy to renew his auto insurance, but he meets the guy's younger, beautiful wife instead. Phyllis Dietrichson, played by Barbara Stanwyck, almost immediately questions Neff about taking out an insurance policy on her husband without his knowledge.</p>
00:06:22	Clip	Clip	<p>Phyllis: Could I get an accident policy for him without bothering him at all?</p> <p>Walter: How's that again?</p> <p>Phyllis: It would make it easier for you, too. You wouldn't even have to talk to him. I have a little allowance of my own. I could pay for it, and he needn't know anything about it.</p> <p>Walter: Why shouldn't he know?</p> <p>Phyllis: Because he doesn't want accident insurance. He—he's superstitious about it.</p> <p>Walter: Lot of people are. That's funny, isn't it?</p> <p>Phyllis: If there was a way to get it like that, all the worry would be over.</p>
00:06:48	April	Host	<p>Neff knows exactly what she means, and he's not interested. Then he decides he is! Only now he's got it worked out with the double indemnity clause, which would pay out double if the death was an accident.</p>
00:07:01	Clip	Clip	<p>Walter: There's a clause in every accident policy, a little thing called double indemnity. The insurance companies put it in as sort of a come on to the customers. That means they pay double on certain accidents. The kind that almost never happen. Like, for instance, if a guy is killed on the train, they pay \$100,000 instead of \$50,000.</p> <p>Phyllis: I see.</p> <p>Walter: We're hitting it for the limit, baby. That's why it's got to be the train.</p>
00:07:20	April	Host	<p>Phyllis takes her husband to the train station, and Neff hides in the</p>

back seat and kills him. Then he gets on the train with Dietrichson's uh, ticket, jumps off at the back, and pulls the guy's body onto the tracks to make it seem like an accident.

All seems well and good, but Keyes' gut tells him that Phyllis killed her husband, probably with an accomplice, to collect on the policy.

00:07:41	Clip	Clip	<p>Barton: Walter, I had dinner two hours ago, and it stuck halfway.</p> <p>Walter: Little man of yours is acting up again, huh?</p> <p>Barton: There's something wrong with the Dietrichson case.</p> <p>Walter: Why, because they didn't file a claim? Maybe just didn't have time. Maybe he just didn't know that he was insured.</p>
00:07:56	April	Host	<p>He tells this to Neff while Phyllis even hides behind a door, so uh, things are kind of closing in on this couple. It didn't work out how they wanted it to.</p> <p>Neff talks to Phyllis' beautiful, virginal stepdaughter, Lola, who tells him she thinks Phyllis did it, and that she probably killed her mother, whom Phyllis had once been a caregiver to.</p>
00:08:13	Clip	Clip	<p>Lola: Do you know who that nurse was?</p> <p>Walter: No, who?</p> <p>Lola: Phyllis. I tried to tell my father, but I was just a kid then. He wouldn't listen to me. Six months later, she married him, and I—I kind of talked myself out of the idea she could have done anything like that. But now it's all back again. Now that something's happened to my father, too.</p>
00:08:32	April	Host	<p>Two serendipitous things then happen. Keyes has a witness who says the man on the train was younger than Dietrichson, and Lola tells Neff that her boyfriend, Nino, has also been having an affair with Phyllis.</p> <p>Bingo. Neff goes to Phyllis, says he's gonna pin it on her and Nino.</p>
00:08:49	Clip	Clip	<p>Walter: What do you think's gonna happen to you? You helped him do the murder, didn't you? That's what Keyes thinks, and what's good enough for Keyes is good enough for me.</p> <p>Phyllis: Maybe it's not good enough for me, Walter. Maybe I don't go for the idea. Maybe I'd rather talk.</p> <p>Walter: Sometimes people are where they can't talk. Under six feet of dirt, maybe.</p>
00:09:07	April	Host	<p>She shoots him in the shoulder, but can't kill him. He grabs the gun and kills her. Neff warns Nino not to go see Phyllis, thereby saving him, then he goes to his office to record that confession we started hearing at the beginning of the film.</p> <p>Keyes overhears it. Neff tries to leave to flee to Mexico, but</p>

collapses from his gunshot wound.

00:09:27 Clip Clip **Walter:** Know why you couldn't figure this one, Keyes? I'll tell you. Because the guy you were looking for was too close. Right across the desk from you.

Keyes: Closer than that, Walter.

Walter: I love you, too.

00:09:45 April Host Keyes then lights Neff's cigarette for him, an act of mercy and love, as the sirens grow nearer. And that's the movie.

I want to get into um, some of the things about this—this movie. It is an adaptation, but it's a very, in some ways, a loose adaptation of this. And um, also Chandler had not really worked in film. Raymond Chandler was like, known for kind of like, the pulpy noir stuff that had not worked in film. It just wasn't—wasn't big yet there.

Um, but there's something that um, Billy Wilder figured out in this film, that certain things can look wonderful on the page, but will not be photographable.

And he said, quote: "Paramount bought *Double Indemnity*, and I was eager to work with Cain, but he was tied up working on a picture at Fox called *Western Union*. A producer-friend, Joe Sistrem, brought me some Chandler stories from *The Black Mask*. You could see the man had a wonderful eye.

"I remember two lines from those stories especially: 'Nothing is emptier than an empty swimming pool.' The other is when Marlowe goes to Pasadena in the middle of the summer and drops in on a very old man who is sitting in a greenhouse covered in three blankets. He says, 'Out of his ears grew hair long enough to catch a moth.' A great eye, he had, but then you don't know if that will work in pictures because the details in writing have to be photographable." End quote.

And as a writer yourself, I mean, there have to be times where you're tempted to put in these like, really poetic flourishes, but there's just not a real—there's not a way that you can always photograph them.

00:11:16 Isabel Guest In my own movie, though—should I talk about my movie?

00:11:19 April Host Yeah. Definitely. That's why you're here.

00:11:21 Isabel Guest Um, yeah.

[April laughs.]

There are actually, you know, certain sequences, like uh, a love letter being read by Alex, the male character, and that—the scene dissolves into like, a fantasy central scene, where Olivia, the trans woman character, is uh, maybe pleasuring herself. Actually is listening to the words.

And, yeah, I think I'm also becoming really more visual. The more movies I make, I feel like the less I rely on dialogue. Or if I use dialogue, I employ dialogue to obfuscate the character's real intentions. Which is, I think, pretty typical of noir. These very shady characters who are duplicitous, and very devious, which is represented very much by Phyllis Dietrichson.

- 00:12:24 April Host I think something that I've heard from a lot of filmmakers too, that their actual writing process does change the longer that they've been filmmaking. You said before, Billy Wilder, this was his third film. This was, um—and he was known for doing comedies before this.
- 00:12:41 Isabel Guest My process is, I feel like I have two versions of the script. One is my version as a director, that's usually less than 90 pages. But there's also kind of the official version that we show potential investors and financiers. It's between 90 and 120 pages, because that's the length of a typical script. Um, and in terms of my process, I feel like—
- 00:13:13 April Host Wait. I mean, we should back up, because I think that people will probably want to know what is in that extra like, 20 pages that you might add on, that you'd want to show a financier.
- 00:13:24 Isabel Guest Um, just dialogue. Mostly dialogue where characters—there might be a little more exposition. Um, my films tend to be quite sparse when it comes to like, explaining things and what's going on to viewers. I let my viewers meet me halfway, and kind of fill in the blanks in certain ways narratively, because I think that's more interesting and that makes viewers more invested in the story, dramatically.
- 00:14:29 April Host Okay, so you mentioned a few things that I want to get back to, because I'm curious about this. The fact that we've got voiceover narration for this story, which a lot of people um, you know, in their careers are warned away to do. Like, don't do this because it feels tacky or cheesy or something. But, um, you know, and actually, Billy Wilder felt the same, but he used it, and he was very specific about how he used it.

So it's really more dialogue, and I find that when I'm on set and when I'm rehearsing the scene between actors, I think actors' faces can be so expressive that words become superfluous in certain scenes. Yeah, and that's the kind of cinema, I guess, that I want to—want to make, where characters' faces can be so captivating and intriguing. Because that's what cinema is about, like, looking at faces, I feel.

He said, quote: "I have always been a great man for narration, and not because it is a lazy man's crutch. That is maybe true, but it is not easy to have good narration done well. What I had in *Sunset Boulevard*, for instance, the narrator being a dead man, was economical storytelling. You can say in two lines something that would take 20 minutes to dramatize, to show, and to photograph. There are a lot of guys who try narration, but they don't quite know the technique. Most of the time the mistake is that they are telling you something in narration that you already see, that is self-evident, but if it adds, if it brings in something new, another perspective, then

good.” End quote.

And you know, I think that it works in both *Sunset Boulevard* and this, and it is economical storytelling. It is like, the easiest way. And I don't notice it in the way that sometimes I notice narration in a movie, because it um, it is, you know, describing what we see, and redundant.

00:15:51 Isabel Guest Exactly. And I feel like here in *Double Indemnity*, like, the narration works because it's not, like you said, telling us what the film is already showing, but it's immersing us into a tone and an atmosphere and a world.

And even myself, for the longest time, have always had an ambivalent relationship with narration and voiceover, because I feel like it's lazy storytelling. But then I realize that I'm doing it in my own film, but I'm also doing it in a very unique way that the movie opens and closes with a voiceover of my character.

It's either, you know, a phone call between myself and my mother, and—it's usually a conversation between two characters. And when it's transposed over an image, it's totally different.

Like, halfway through the film there is extreme wide shot of my character on an elevated subway, and the camera slowly zooms in, and what you hear is pillow talk essentially between my character and the slaughterhouse worker. And it makes the conversation actually feel more intimate, and as it's closing the gap, the shot is closing in, it also introduces a kind of anxiety and claustrophobia and paranoia.

And I like the dissonance between that intimacy and the paranoia. Those are the tensions that excite me as a filmmaker.

00:17:32 April Host Um, well yeah, then I can see why you chose this film.

00:17:36 Isabel Guest Yeah.

[Both laugh.]

00:17:37 Music Transition “Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:17:39 April Host Um, we're gonna take a quick break. When we come back, we're gonna talk more *Double Indemnity* and also uh, *Lingua Franca* movie and all the rest of the films that Isabel Sandoval has made and is going to make. We'll be right back.

[Music fades.]

00:17:54 Promo Promo **Music:** “Baby You Change Your Mind” by Nouvellas.

Raleigh Smirl: I'm Raleigh Smirl.

Sydnee McElroy: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor Smirl: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: And together, we host a podcast called *Still Buffering*, where we answer questions like...

Raleigh: Why should I not fall asleep first at a slumber party?

Taylor: How do I be fleek?

Sydnee: Is it okay to break up with someone using emojis?

Taylor: And sometimes we talk about buuutts!

Raleigh: Nooo, we don't! Nope!

[Sydnee and Taylor laugh.]

Sydnee: Find out the answers to these important questions and many more on *Still Buffering*, a sisters' guide to teens through the ages.

Raleigh: I am a teenager.

Sydnee & Taylor: And I... was... too.

Taylor: Butts, butts, butts, butts butts!

Raleigh: No... *[Laughs.]*

Music:

*Baby, you change your mind
Far too many times
Over and over again
Over and over again*

[Music fades out.]

00:18:41 Music Transition "Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:18:48 April Host Welcome back to *Switchblade Sisters*. I'm April Wolfe, and I'm joined today by Isabel Sandoval, and we're talking about *Double Indemnity*.

Um, so something that I love about this movie that I didn't really notice that I loved is something that Richard Schickel pointed out in the commentary as well.

He said, quote: "One of the nice things about this movie is its judicious use of location shooting around Los Angeles. There's not a lot of it, but there's just enough to take it out of the studio context, give it the atmosphere of a city that is free-er in its morality than the east. It's something Cain noticed, and something Wilder noticed when he came to Los Angeles." End quote.

Um, so there's a few things happening here, and one of those is that I do love its location shooting, even though it's primarily shot in a studio soundstage. But there is just enough that it makes me feel

like there are more locations than there actually are that are part of LA, and you know, I love that. I'm a huge fan of like, going out to locations and, especially in classic films, and visiting like, the house from this movie.

Um, and then secondly, we're talking about two people. One, an immigrant from outside of the U.S., and one, a New Yorker who both come to Los Angeles. And again, the idea of outsiders realizing something kind of um, profound about the—the identity of a city. A place that they're not from, but they can kind of um, pinpoint what is different about it. And um, I just—I love that aspect of it, in both of these.

I'm an Angelino, and I love it here, and [*Sighs*] you know, any movie that can also poke fun at it and it's immoral way—

[*Both laugh.*]

—that's wonderful, too. But, I think, you know, in *Lingua Franca*, I see that as well. I see a judicious use of locations around you.

00:20:43 Isabel Guest

Yeah, I—it was very important for me that the film had a really vivid and strong sense of place. And like, also, that's why I set it in Brighton Beach, because it's not your, you know, predictable and generic New York type of movie.

Especially in the outer boroughs like Brooklyn and Queens, where there are a lot of ethnic and immigrant neighborhoods, they each have their own distinct character and personality that's so different from Manhattan, or even white hipster neighborhoods like Williamsburg.

Like, for me in my neighborhood, if I take the subway half an hour south to Brighton Beach, I feel like I'm whisked off not just to a different world but to a different time. Like, I feel like I'm back in the 50s and 60s in a way. And I wanted to show that in *Lingua Franca*. I wanted to open *Lingua Franca* with that kind of montage that just drops you into this strange world that still is part of New York City, and then have my character's voiceover in Cebuana, which is my native dialect. And just kind of the juxtaposition of a place that is supposed to be America, but has its own foreign—distinct foreign flavor, and then this voiceover, which is another foreign culture.

00:22:13 April Host

One of the greater things that this movie did that uh, differed from James M. Cain's book was that they didn't make Phyllis completely a psychopath, 'cause they made her—in the book, was very like, chilling, and just like, insane, right?

[*Isabel affirms.*]

Um, but, as Richard Schickel points out, they cleared that out, and they simplified her. They made her less psychotically damaged in the movie, instead just a woman who is in it for the money. And, um, and that's a—it's a—kind of, you know, like we're trying to relate characters. Like, whenever you're trying to put something on the screen, you're trying to make some kind of character who's

relatable, even if they're evil, even if they do something else.

And it—I think it would be too hard for someone to, like, stop and like, relate to a wom—especially back in 1944 when this came in and just like, “I don't understand the psychotic woman, like, what is happening?”

But to make someone who was just like, in, you know, like, post-Depression period, who, like, wants the money makes a lot of sense.

00:23:19 Isabel

Guest

Although, I think the one thing I think could've been worked on in *Double Indemnity* is I feel like the fact the femme fatale character, you know, um, Barbara Stanwyck, is really kind of a psychological cipher.

[April hums affirmatively.]

She's really a textbook femme fatale, with not much depth to her. And I think that's also the same way with Fred MacMurray, um, Walter Neff, because of how he decides to get involved in this crazy scheme, you just—he sells it with a voiceover, essentially.

Like, “Oh, this is how I got involved, and this,” and, um, but that—I guess that's the point of Wilder. It's not about, you know, psychological depth or, um, acuity, so to speak, but it's a—having a noir that's very stylish, um, and with all these elements just coming together.

00:24:23 April

Host

Yeah, um, there's like a—there's a lot of smoldering scenes, and the characters always have chemistry, there's always something to say, and if there is nothing to say, then it's very, very pregnant pauses. Um, and highly choreo—choreographed scenes.

Like the—the one, for instance, where Phyllis is hiding behind the door, and um, Wal—the—the keys could come up, and see her, and then Walter Neff has to, like, block him, and it's just that, those scenes of tension.

And that's an interesting thing, too, that scene—and I'll bring this up, 'cause then we can kind of get into how we're shooting things. That was a deep focused scene, meaning that—in Hollywood, at that time, deep focus was very much a novelty. It was only used in a few different movies, uh, *Citizen Kane*, most popularly, but it was primarily shallow focus that you were seeing in movies.

And, um, so having a deep-focused scene like that, where you could see the relationship between bodies in a space, with such a kind of like, grand scale, it really opened up, I think, um, particularly, uh, film noir to even horror beyond it to just this idea of, um tension between bodies.

And—and I love that, because then you get to use, um, really wonderful choreography, like more inventive choreography, if, you know, um, and you don't even—it's like, it can be a static shot, you know, it's just—it's just the bodies moving makes the tension.

00:25:58 Isabel Guest Yeah, I think, um, before this, if I—you know, if I remember correctly, you know, film noir was not really taken seriously as a genre? Or as a—you know, like, as an artistic genre. It was something that, say, War—Warner Brothers did if they wanted to make something on the cheap—you know, so it was just kind of thrown together, and I think because of *Double Indemnity*, and Wilder really putting it his distinctive stamp, and it turned out to be a critical and box office success. Like, they started seeing the possibility and potential for noir to be a serious artistic genre.

00:26:44 April Host Yeah. I mean, that's the same way that I feel about horror.

Which I—I always feel like horror is kind of like, a cousin of film noir, in terms of like, who—who was making horror films, and how they're making them. Because it's a place of innovation if you're doing it correctly, I think. And film noir, we see with Billy Wilder, you know. I can see that in your film, too. I can actually see there's a—a noir influence in—because like you're saying before, there's a kind of, um, there's a stillness to the camera in—in what you're doing.

00:27:15 April Host I wouldn't necessarily classify your film as a noir, I can feel that tinge deeply in its identity.

00:27:22 Isabel Guest Definitely. And I feel like, um, *Señorita*, my first film, is really a neo-noir, in a way.

[April hums affirmatively.]

Both stylistically and in terms of how it's, you know, lit and shot, but also because my main characters tend to be women with secrets. Which is, you know, the most quintessential noir element, I think. Like, women with a dark—

00:27:49 April Host Yeah. It's the thing you have to have.

00:27:50 Isabel Guest —shadowy past, exactly. But—

[April laughs and affirms.]

You know, how I kind of update and subvert noir in my own work is that the femme fatales are fully developed, complex, layered characters. They're not just there to seduce the guy and have him kill someone for money.

00:28:08 April Host It's an interesting thing, because, like, with—with a movie like *Double Indemnity*, I think, in terms of what I've had to do my entire life of watching genre films is sometimes I project my own feelings onto women characters. I project them, or what I think about them isn't necessarily in the text or the subtext of the movie, but I'm like, "Oh, I love this character, for her richness of this and this and this."

But if I watch it, it's not there, it's what I'm putting onto her. Because she is, as you said, a cipher, and that allows me to kind of fill her with my own thoughts and feelings about her. Whereas just, like, I love Phylis, and I have a very specific idea of why I love Phyllis, that may not be in the movie, but that's open for interpretation, 'cause it's, you know, what I love.

And now you have people who can be more, um, you know, with— with women behind the camera, kind of being more explicit about, uh, feminine desire and—and greed, and all of these other wonderful vices and virtues. So it's just a different—different era. But, you know, you still have to have some—I mean, do you have— do you have a—a—is it tempting to make a man a cipher?

00:29:17 Isabel Guest In a way, that happens organically, in my own work, because I just do not understand the psychology of a man.

[Both laugh.]

Like my main characters, even before I transitioned, my main protagonists have always been women. That's just how I think and feel and write characters in my work.

[April affirms.]

The women are developed. Like—in my second feature, *Apparition*, the one about the nuns, there are virtually zero men characters. And if they are, and if they have lines, you can barely see them in the frame. So when I write—

[Both laugh.]

So like, in *Lingua Franca*, when I was writing the scenes with just the man like, hanging—you know, shooting the shit, I asked my guy friends to read the dialogue, and see if it worked—if it sounded—if it rang true, um, yeah. But I don't really care about the men characters in my movies. But my women are so, you know, they're multi-layered, you can peel so many layers and still not get to the bottom of what makes them tick.

00:30:31 April Host I mean, as you see pretty clearly in *Lingua Franca*, which I think is kind of a study in seeing how little you can give and still know—or don't, *[Laughs]* you know like, think you know this character.

00:30:45 Music Transition “Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:30:46 April Host Um, we're gonna take another quick break. When we come back, we'll talk more *Double Indemnity* and *Lingua Franca* with Isabel Sandoval. We'll be right back.

[Music fades.]

00:30:58 Promo Promo *[Sound of a gavel banging three times.]*

Music: Upbeat music plays under dialogue.

Speaker 1: Judge John Hodgman ruled in my favor.

Speaker 2: Judge John Hodgman ruled in my friend's favor.

Speaker 3: Judge John Hodgman ruled in my favor.

Judge John Hodgman: I'm Judge John Hodgman. You're hearing the voices of real litigants. Real people, who have submitted disputes to my internet court, at the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I hear their cases. I ask them questions—they're good ones—and then I tell them who's right and who's wrong.

Speaker 1: Thanks to Judge John Hodgman's ruling, my dad has been forced to retire one of the worst Dad Jokes of all time.

Speaker 3: Instead of cutting his own hair with a Flowbee, my husband has his hair cut professionally.

Speaker 4: I have to join a community theatre group.

Speaker 5: And my wife has stopped bringing home wild animals.

Judge John Hodgman: It's the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. Find it every Wednesday at MaximumFun.org, or wherever you download podcasts.

[Sound of a gavel banging three times.]

Speaker 1: Thanks, Judge John Hodgman!

[Music ends.]

00:31:55	Music	Transition	"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:32:01	April	Host	Welcome back to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> . I'm April Wolfe, and I'm joined today by Isabel Sandoval, and we're talking about <i>Double Indemnity</i> . Um, so something that Billy Wilder said about screenwriting is, quote: "A screenwriter is a bum poet, a third rate dramatist, a kind of half-assed engineer. You got to build that bridge so it will carry the traffic. Everything else, the acting, the drama, happens on the set. Screenwriting is a mixture of techniques, and a little literary talent, sure, but also a sense of how to manage it, so they will not fall asleep. You can't bore the actors or the audience." End quote. That's kind of his guiding principle. He's just like, "Don't bore people." You know, if you've got to say exposition, say it in a really uh, interesting way, you know?
00:32:50	Isabel	Guest	Yeah. I think he is the perfect and ideal studio director. You know, you've got to keep your audiences entertained. But what I also—what made <i>Double Indemnity</i> powerful for me was, just to allude to what I talked to in the beginning, was really how it gives an emotional gut-punch in the end, in the terms of the relationship between the two main characters. And I'm wondering if that was controversial at the time, because you know, it can be read as a little homoerotic.
00:33:25	April	Host	But I think people back then just weren't even aware of homoeroticism. I think that they like, maybe it's like, "Yeah, of course a man loves a man." But they like, didn't get like, what that

meant or, you know, I think that like,. There was a kind of ignorance of that. It's a weird—I mean, I'm fairly—a very, a little familiar with um, with Filipino filmmaking, contemporary Filipino filmmaking. And I think the way that your work sits in that kind of canon is very different. It is not a Brillante Mendoza kind of like, very in-your-face. I can still see naturalism there, like you know, I think naturalism seems like a very Filipino concept. Um, but—

00:34:15 Isabel Guest

Yeah, the sensibility is very different. Because I feel like with Brillante Mendoza, his European counterpart may be like, the Dardenne Brothers. You know, it's a very gritty, hand-held docudrama about people living in slums. I know that has, like—the current wave of Philippine cinema has been accused of—and I hate using this term—poverty porn.

[April affirms.]

But yeah, you see kind of these people you know, in misery, and I wanted to do something diff—although on paper, *Lingua Franca* sounds like a standard you know, or textbook or social issue drama. I did that deliberately so that I can then separate people's expectations about the kind of movie that it will be. So, it's a far more delicate, lyrical, sensual than that kind of film, and as a result, it's somewhat polarizing.

The very first trade reviews about the film that came out after Venice were written by literally reviewers that said, "Oh, it should have been more like a Brillante Mendoza movie."

00:35:36 April Host

Uh, see, that's the thing. You'd be, like, uh, I think that if you come from like, a specific culture, you're kind of standing in the shadow of giants. I think that you'll easily separate yourself from the pack.
[Laughs.]

Um, I wanted to get into some set anecdotes from *Double Indemnity*, see if you've had any kind of parallels in your own career.

Um, there was, uh—Billy Wilder was very specific about the things that he wrote, the things that he shot. He really tried to never overshoot anything. You know, he knew that like, the celluloid was valuable, and he was just like, very, again, economical about what he was doing. So he was very precise. But, at the same time, he would still let inspiration strike him in the moment, and there is definitely one of those things within this.

He—um, Richard Schickel said, quote: "Their not being able to start the car was a superb invention of Wilder's. He was shooting the scene on the soundstage—" and he's talking about after they drag the body on, and they try to make their getaway, and they try to start the car and it won't.

"He was shooting this scene on the soundstage, broke for lunch, got in his car, and his car wouldn't start. He said, 'Oh my god, what a great thing. They're about to make their getaway, and their car won't start.' He went running back to the soundstage, hoping they

hadn't knocked down this mock automobile they had created, and they hadn't.

"He said, 'Hold it. We'll redo the scene this afternoon. MacMurray objected that nobody would believe it, but it works. It's like when the woman interrupts them in the market for the baby food. It locks them into the reality of the city they're in. It keeps the story grounded.'" End quote.

Um, so there's a few things on this, of just like, the allowing that inspiration to strike and then just kind of carrying it out. And people are like, "Oh, that's not in the script, I don't know." And he's just like, "Eh, I don't care." [Laughs] It's an extra beat of the story that kind of ratchets up the tension, and it feels miraculous, and so you go with it.

I think it might be easier to do sometimes in an independent film set, because you have a ragtag crew, and you're just like, "Let's get it done, oh my god. I can't believe the light looks like this. We should definitely catch the light." You know, like that kind of thing.

00:37:46 Isabel Guest

Yeah, definitely. I mean, you know, there is a scene in *Lingua Franca* where the main character has an emotional breakdown, and we shot the entire scene in a single shot that moves from one end of the room, you know, to the other. And my cinematographer was arguing with his crew because—and they were saying that, "We can't. You know, you can't do this on like a studio production." And that's exactly—I mean, my DB said, "Exactly, that's why we're doing it here. Because we can."

And they weren't sure they could pull it off, but after like forty-five minutes, an hour, they were able to set it up, and we got this scene after three takes. And *Lingua Franca* was actually shot in just sixteen days, given all those locations.

And, yeah, you have to be, as an inde—independent filmmaker, you have to be really on it. So when that—even though I was also acting, I made sure that I knew what I was gonna do on set. You know, exactly the shots that I want. I have a very clear idea when I conceive of my films. I conceive of them not as words on a page, but as actual shots, and, you know, scenes cut together, and that's what helps me so that I—

I get into an argument with my DP, because he also has a very strong visual sense, and he does amazing work in this film. But when I—I wrote the ending of *Lingua Franca* a certain way, which—which we cut out, from the final cut, but the final shots supposed to be of *Lingua Franca* was of my character walking out of the house, but it was shot from across the street, and I wrote it. But when I saw the footage I thought it looked like shit.

[Both laugh.]

We changed the framing of it a different way, where you see her from the side, and that worked. It looked much better. So, yeah, I— I’m very intuitive, and that’s why sometimes my DP and I get into arguments, because he is very structured, and he wants everything planned.

And I’m the type that if—I wanna see first if it works, especially because sometimes we would get our locations not until the day before. Like, the slaughterhouse? We did not confirm that slaughterhouse until the day before we were supposed to shoot there.

- 00:40:31 April Host Aw, man. Biting nails! ‘Cause that’s a big part. Of just like—*[April breaks off, laughing.]*
- 00:40:35 Isabel Guest Exactly. If that were—no.
- 00:40:37 April Host How were you—I mean, how would you recreate a slaughterhouse? You’re just like, “Okay, we’ve gotta get about ten whole skinned cows, hung up, uh—”
- 00:40:49 Isabel Guest Exactly. Yeah. And so on the day we shot it they were like, “Okay, you have four hours, three or—three.” *[Laughs]* And we paid 10k for that slaughterhouse. And, so, we had to do everything, in those four hours.
- 00:40:00 April Host Yeah. You didn’t have to dress it. I mean, it comes—it came with the meat, that’s a big benefit.
- The, uh—I wanna go back to the other part of this quote, where the—um, Schickel is talking about that—the woman in the market— ‘cause they always meet in that market—who interrupts them, looking for baby food. And this kind of thing of just like, creating tension between two characters and having this outside force kind of like, come in, that complicates things momentarily. Even if it’s just for something silly and stupid.
- And—and I love that kind of technique in screenwriting. And some people might think that that, in—in some ways, would be like, “Oh, that’s a mistake. It just takes it away, we’ll cut it first.” But it’s such a little thing that I adore, um, about this movie, and just like the—the small details of the outside world kind of butting into their plans and their plot.
- 00:41:57 Isabel Guest It adds to the sense of realism in the film. And also it’s a—it’s a dry—the dry humor.
- 00:42:06 April Host It’s such a strange thing. I mean, like, that—Billy Wilder, who, you know, uh, did comedies, including *The Apartment*, such a big, big comedy movie. I just think, you see that sensibility, and the way that he’s kind of structuring things.

And, you know, something that he was talking about, um, you know, when this movie came out, ‘cause people just didn’t understand why

he was going to make this particular movie, um, and he just didn't think that it would be any different from what he did usually.

He said, quote: "I don't make only one kind of movie, like, say, Hitchcock, or like Manelli, doing the great metro-musicals. As a picture-maker, and I think most of us are this way, I am not aware of patterns. We're not aware that this picture will be this genre. It comes naturally, just the way you do your handwriting. That's the way I look at it, that's the way I conceive it. When you see movies, you decide to put some kind of connective theory to them.

"You may ask me, 'Do you remember that, in a picture you wrote in 1935, the motive of the good guy was charity? And then the echo and that sentiment reappears in four more pictures?' Or, 'You put the camera here,' I'm totally unaware of it. I never think in those terms. The big overall theme of my oeuvre. I—you're trying to make as good and as entertaining a picture as you possibly can.

"If you have a—any kind of style, the discerning ones will detect it. I can always tell you a Hitchcock picture, I can tell you a King Vidor picture, a Capra picture. You develop a handwriting, but you don't do it consciously."

You know, for someone like yourself, who's doing both contemporary storytelling and a number of period pieces, um, I think that's an—an interesting thing to arrive at, to know about yourself as a filmmaker. That you're trying to bring that one kernel of who you are into every story that you tell, no matter what it is.

00:43:56 Isabel Guest Exactly. And I think, ultimately, my goal is to—for my films to become their own genre, so to speak. Uh, when you think about it, a genre is really just a type of emotional sensibility, and a film that is so strong, and so effective, and also very popular that it becomes a formula, so to speak.

And studios just want to replicate either that type of dramatic structure or that atmosphere, because it transports you to a different world. Um, and the most iconic auteurs and directors have become genres unto themselves. Like, Wes Andersen is a genre, that's—you know. Let's be serious. Like, you're like Tarantino.

00:44:46 April Host Yeah. Charlie Kaufman is a genre.

[Isabel affirms.]

There's—David Lynch is a genre, yeah.

00:44:51 Isabel Guest Jarmusch is a genre. Very much so. And yeah. I want to have that—develop my sensibility to that level, but also not put me in a box, so to speak. So even within that—within that genre, so to speak, I can still experiment and play, you know, with certain tones, and the certain stories. Um, *[inaudible]* does it, and quite well, you know?

00:45:17 Music Transition "Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:45:18 April Host Well, I mean, you've got your work cut out for you, but you're well on your way, Isabel. I wanna thank you so much, um, for coming on

the show, and for talking about this movie, and your movie, *Lingua Franca*. And, again, people can see that movie on Netflix, right now. Um, and thank you, so much, for coming on.

00:45:34 Isabel Guest Thank you so much, April. I had so much fun talking about *Double Indemnity*.

00:45:37 April Host And thank you for listening to *Switchblade Sisters*.

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.]

00:46:04 Clip Clip **Walter:** Little man of yours is acting up again, huh?

00:46:07 Speaker 1 Promo MaximumFun.org.

00:46:09 Speaker 2 Promo Comedy and culture.

00:46:10 Speaker 3 Promo Artist owned—

00:46:11 Speaker 4 Promo —Audience supported.