

DEMAN Live: NBC's Good Girls: From Script to Screen

INTRO: Dave Karger 0:04

Welcome to DEMAN Live. I'm DAVE KARGER, Duke alum and host on Turner Classic Movies. DEMAN is the Duke Entertainment, Media and Arts Network. And it's the University's hub for the creative industries. On this show, you'll hear a past episodes of DEMAN Live, which includes panels and one on one chats with alumni. Thanks so much for listening, and enjoy.

Hi, everyone. My name is DAVE KARGER, I graduated from Duke in 1995. I'm a host on Turner Classic Movies. And it is absolutely my pleasure to introduce the amazing panel that we have here today. And I'm just so excited for this event. And especially because at the forefront is my Duke freshman dorm mate Lisa Katz, class of 95, who really instigated this, and was the driving force behind making this happen. And she and I graduated together 25 years ago, haven't had our 25th reunion just yet. Maybe one day, it will actually happen. But it's been so fun for me to see her crazy, amazing, impressive rise through the ranks at Fox and now NBC, where she is the Co-President of scripted at NBC. Am I right? Lisa said, That is correct! So, well done you.

So we're here to talk about one of her great shows, which is Good Girls. And you've gathered together three of your cohorts from the show, one of whom, your star Retta along with Mae Whitman, and Christina Hendricks, is a Dukie herself. So what I'm going to do there she has what's up Retta. And then also we have Bill Krebs and Jenna Bans who are the showrunners writers, exec producers, Jen is also the creator of the show.

So what I want to do before we get started, is just kind of have the four of us special guests. Introduce yourself a little bit. And I'm going to start with you, Lisa. And I just want you to explain to everybody who's watching this, what you do, generally at your job at NBC and then specifically, what do you do in relation to the show, Good Girls. So take it away, Lisa.

Lisa Katz 2:27

All right, well, Hi, everybody. I run scripted programming for NBC. I've been in this position for about two years, prior to that I ran drama development at NBC, which means that we develop all the one hour scripted programs that air on the network. And it was within maybe my first like month on the job, Jenna came or actually we went to a bar and Jen over drinks, Jenna pitched a couple ideas she had that she was thinking in terms of doing a show. And she pitched a couple lines of what would be Good Girls. And I said that's the one. And she quickly came in and pitched it to the rest of the team and wrote an incredible script and cast an amazing group of women. And we shot it and picked it up. So it was one of the first shows I developed and produced while I was at NBC and we're so happy that now it's going into its fourth season.

Dave Karger 3:37

Yeah, congrats to you all on the renewal season for which I guess was about two months ago that that was announced? I think, right?

Transcript

Lisa Katz 3:45

It feels like it could have been last week it could I was like it could have been seven years ago. who really knows? Jenna, what do you recall from that meeting at the bar.

Jenna Bans 3:55

I recall, we were definitely at a bar having some drinks. And one of the things I love about this group at NBC and Lisa in particular, is that as a writer, you go in to pitch meetings or whatever with a few ideas going, they're gonna pick the conventional one, they're gonna pick the procedural one, they're gonna pay I had like a medical examiner, one that I wasn't excited about at all, but I was like, I know they want something like that. So I'll just do it. And what I love about Lisa and her team is that, you know, I don't know that you could tell I was bored by the other ones or that they you yourself, which I think it's more this just gravitate to more sort of original ideas. And yeah, I got a couple lines out. I think I said it's about three women who are just sort of fed up with their lives and decide to rob a grocery store, which if you just heard that out of context, you'd be like, what, why what? And she was like, I love it. Let's do that. Go work on it. So um, yeah, I just remember she was really receptive to the idea of front and then I knew it was going to be a really good time collaborating with her to make it come to life.

Dave Karger 5:04

So as I said, Jenna, you're the creator of the show, both you and Bill are writers and EPs, can you take us through, you know, kind of on a macro level and on a day to day level how this show fits in with your life? Because I'm sure you're doing other projects at the same time?

Jenna Bans 5:20

Well, yeah. Yeah. I mean, it's, it's, I mean, Bill and I sort of work as a team,

Bill Krebs 5:31

I met Jenna on another show for ABC years ago called The Family and we sort of developed a kind of a rapport and in an ease of use of like, how we kind of work together. And so when this pilot came out, Jenna sent it to me and early on, I remember reading and I just like, Oh, this is this is definitely gonna get picked up. There's like, I was super excited about it, and then came on board, season one. And then

Jenna Bans 6:00

what I have in bill is something most creators don't get is it's, it can be a really lonely job. You know, you of course, have a whole staff of writers and they're always awesome. But at the end of the day, it's some shows are more your voice. And you know, the characters are more in your head. And it's hard. And I've been in the position on on other shows as a writer, where it's been hard for me to get what the creator wants, because it's so it's such a subjective, specific thing. So when I met Bill, he's sort of just got it right away. And I remember thinking, I was like, I think he might write these women better than I do. And I was like, when you find someone like that, you're like, Oh, this is the key to having a life. It's the key to not having everything on you. And so ever since then, I think we've been sort of running the show together.

Transcript

Bill Krebs 6:48

But it also helps in like some of our discussions like if we slash fights, lots of lots of fights. Now, but if there's if there's a an argument between Dean and Beth or something, a lot of that comes from our own argument, just discussing the topic that they're discussing, we actually put on the page, kind of even the point of view that we actually had when we were having the very same argument in the writers room. Right it. So it sounds like we get both sides of it. And it helps kind of have alternating point of views. Yeah, within it.

Jenna Bans 7:20

And it's very collaborative. You know, we go, we have a great team of writers who we also work with, we all write sort of every script, and then we take the script through production, a writer goes on set and sort of, you know, helps to produce the episode and then Bill and I kind of jump in again and post and follow the episode through editing and sound mixing. And Bill really, is wonderful with music. And that's become a big, you know, part of the show over the seasons. And I think you can look at the season like you can see season one, it's not like I was doing the music alone, season one you were helping, but I feel like you took a stronger and the music got better the more Bill got involved. Um, anyway, so it's more of...

Bill Krebs 8:03

We found more of the show, and it started to fit the tone of the show more.

Jenna Bans 8:06

So it's, um, yeah, it's a you know, it's a long day, but it's also really fun. And, you know, we always feel really lucky to get to do what we're doing because we're mostly just fighting or laughing or Fighting. Fighting. Writing. Yeah. So....

Dave Karger 8:22

You're work spouses, I like that...

Jenna Bans 8:24

Yeah, totally. In the worst way.

Bill Krebs 8:26

And, and, and divorces, and spouses that divorce. Yeah, exactly. Right.

Dave Karger 8:32

Okay. This is really getting intense, pretty quick. But that's okay.

Bill Krebs 8:37

We're gonna work out all our problems on that's all right. Listen. One of us will be crying by the end of this.

Jenna Bans 8:44

....Or like in five minutes.

Transcript

Dave Karger 8:47

Read, obviously, you had a history with NBC from Parks and Rec. How did the pilot script make its way to you just through the typical channels, did you chase it? What happened?

Jenna Bans 9:00

We chased her.

Retta 9:05

It was it was serendipitously emailed to me, my manager emailed it to me, I was in Vancouver, working on on Girlfriends Guide to Divorce, and which is another NBC Universal show. So I've been with NBC almost my entire life. But I got an email from my manager, you know, because when it's time for pilots to get made, they try to you know, get you as many as you get. I generally don't get a lot of pilots sent to me. But I've been lucky that once I started getting pilots, you know, I've been able to work, but he emailed me and he was like, just look at it and see what it's....He's like, there's gonna be a lot of you know, it was kind of the route thing...there's gonna be a lot come in, don't worry. But this one, this one we were sending you to read and and the creator, the writer wants to meet you on what's the old before zoom? FaceTime? or Skype? We skyped!

It was just like they're, they're willing to Skype with you, whatever, whatever. But it was very you know nonchalant. Because when it comes time for pilot season, you know, actors panic because they're like, This shit is ending. What's next? So I read it and I was like, you know, I got excited like I got I started to get sad, like a little bit salty because I wanted it. And that's the worst because when you want it, you're like, oh, he said to me, when I talked to him, I was like, Yes, I want to meet, I want to meet her. I really like it. I want to do it. And he was like, just chill. But then he said, I did get a note saying they wrote the character with you in mind. And how's that?

Dave Karger 11:09

Oh my god.

Jenna Bans 11:12

It's totally true. By the way, by the way, the other side of this while your manager was being so casual, like, um, don't get, don't get excited, don't get whatever it was. I pitched it with a giant picture of Retta next to the character of Ruby that she plays and then our first offer, I was like, it has to be Retta, there can't be anyone else. So like, she has no idea that on our side, I'm like sweating and crying and like, I can't we can't do the show if it's not Retta. Like, everything was on this Skype, like everything was on this Skype.

Lisa Katz 11:46

She was the prototype.

Jenna Bans 11:48

Transcript

She was totally the prototype.

Retta 11:50

very much like, you know, you when you read something, one that you get, like, you get it. And then you read something where you're like, Oh my God, if I could only do this monologue, like, you know, like, there's a piece that you read where you're like, Please, God, just let me...It's rare that I find that because there aren't parts written for me. But I didn't know that when I read it. But I was like, Please, God, please God. And I wasn't trying to Honestly, I wasn't that crazy. But I know the heart starts to like, beat a little bit. You're like, this one's gonna break my heart. But then I Skyped and, and it was it was you was it wasn't Jeanine. It wasn't....

Jenna Bans 12:43

....I think it was Dean, the director of our pilot...

Retta 12:48

no, it wasn't Dean. Oh, I met Dean at lunch at the lunch.

Jenna Bans 12:53

Oh, was it Liz? It might have been the casting director.

Retta 12:57

I think it might have been Liz. And, and they were so nice. And I was like, Oh, she's so normal, please God. So then I told my manager that I you know, I've met with her. I really like it. So I want to do it. And then I was like, I'm done. So figure it out.

Dave Karger 13:19

That's so great. Lisa, I feel like Good Girls.....and you correct me if I'm mischaracterizing. But I feel like it's a unicorn on the NBC schedule. It doesn't have the word Chicago is the first word of the title. It's not a audience multi camera sitcom directed by the fabulous Jimmy Burrows. And as you were describing your, you know, your your previous job where you were just overseeing what was called quote unquote, drama, The hour long shows. This is an hour long, single cam with tons of great comedic elements to it. In fact, I'd be hard pressed. If I had to call it a comedy or a drama. I'd almost call it a comedy. So it's it's got all of this stuff going on. Was that one of the things that most excited you about the idea? Was there ever. Were there ever discussions like Oh, it's so different from everything else on the schedule? Where's it going to fit in as far as like a programming timeslot? What were the conversations that went on as far as the actual greenlight?

Lisa Katz 14:23

Well, I think I heard the pitch. I really think it we met with Jenna within the first month that I started the job. And I had come from Fox Studios, where we sold to other networks, in addition to Fox Broadcasting, and I kind of understood what each network was they had an identity so I understood like a fox show was I'm gonna use words like muscular and propulsive and noisy and then CBS was a little more traditional procedural. ABC.is a at that time was a lot of the

Transcript

Shondra shows was more female centric or heightened. And I think when I got to NBC, I was trying to figure out what the brand was to be honest, because I wouldn't be selling to it but being inside of it. And I learned that we have these marketing brand pillars that I can run through super quickly. But it's fundamentally positive, human first, intentionally inclusive, and inherent ingenuity. And basically, what that means to me is character driven, aspirational, original, and inclusive. And I thought this show hit all of those things in my mind. And this is us hits all those things in my in the same way.

So a show can hit all of those different targets and be very different from each other. But the thing I had been a fan of Jenna's for a really long time as a writer and was excited to work with her and one of the women on my team, Kara and Jenna were very close. And Kara was responsible, in part for bringing Jenna into the company. And I think for us, we tried to do shows that really tap into someone's passion and vision and what they want to write about. So I think when she referenced that time where we were at the bar, and she was talking about it, like you could see it, you could feel it.

And for us, it's always like, what's the story you want to tell? What's the story you can write that no one else can write. And I think to have a show that really is about very dimensional women going through something and dealing with issues of female empowerment, dealing with female friendship that wasn't on TV. And that was a show that I craved as a viewer but also would be so excited to program. So I think while it might not have seemed the most obvious, it was a show that I felt was the kind of show which we should be doing. And so it wasn't hard to get greenlit to be honest. And Jenna was pregnant with her second and we were trying to get it all done before she had the baby she literally didn't have when she came like two days after we....

Jenna Bans 17:14

yeah...I think it was two or three days after we stopped filming. Oh my god. No, I was Yeah, I was really was really good. She listened.

Bill Krebs 17:24

You were editing while you were like breastfeeding.

Jenna Bans 17:26

I was, They were very flexible with me. The whole company was very flexible with Yeah, very nervous. I would go into labor like on location.

Lisa Katz 17:35

Yeah. That's why we shot Los Angeles. Thank you so much for that. Um, and also, I think to Retta's his point like this show can we cast before other pilots, usually there's this frenzy in network television where you're doing the casting in January and February we cast in November, November, December earlier, we were everything was earlier. Um, but I think that the show just is special. And so it was very easy to fight for. And it was, you know, easy to support.

Transcript

Dave Karger 18:08

Jenna, you and I both for you and Bill, when you guys are, you know, crafting the show, as far as overall arcs, but also individual episodes. Do you think about the ingredients? Because it does have comedy, drama, crime, action. All of these things that mesh so well together. Has that balance of all four of those or whatever other ones that I'm not mentioning right now...Has it changed? Have you wanted the show to fluctuate from season to season or within a season and become funnier in certain parts? And, you know, lean more on the action other parts? Or do you want all of the different ingredients to blend evenly all the time?

Bill Krebs 18:51

Well I think the first part of that is, we always talk about this, that this shows a tonal high wire, because it's it is a comedy, it is a drama. And if you lean too far in one direction, you get an entirely different show. And you kind of have to thread that needle and like go right down the middle. Otherwise, it isn't our show tonally. And we always whenever we meet with new writers, we're always very, very vigilant about making sure that they understand that and that they can kind of do both those elements as well. Because when it comes to the comedy, or the drama, it all comes from character first. And it's not like we're writing jokes, we write scenes or moments that revolve from an emotional point of view, usually from the character and whether it's there in the middle of the crime or whatever they're doing, that's probably going to be what makes our jokes land the hardest or

Jenna Bans 19:39

Because yeah, because their reaction to the situation as funny, as opposed to them making

Bill Krebs 19:45

making a joke. Yeah, and so we so that's true of all of it, you know, whatever, whatever we're leaning into, whether it's the crime or whatever it usually is coming from some place of the character story that we're that we're trying to tell about them or about one of the you know, one of the characters in general.

Jenna Bans 20:02

And I'd say it's probably I mean, I guess I think we aim for mostly a blend. Yeah. But even the two of us will write a scene with something will make us laugh as we're talking about it. And then we'll write it and go, you know, it just happened today. Yeah, we're like, oh, we've cracked up so hard. About a year ago, we were like fighting to make it work. And it doesn't work. It's too broad. It didn't seem like the character that was saying,

Bill Krebs 20:25

It pulls out of the moment of the that you're trying to get across.

Jenna Bans 20:28

Transcript

Sometimes we literally find it on the page. We're like, yeah, we love it. But it's it's not our show. And you know, we have to sort of kill it. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. It wasn't your joke, Retta. It wasn't your joke.

Bill Krebs 20:43

yeah..Retta makes anything funny. We didn't we, we could just write anything, and it's gonna be funny. So...

Dave Karger 20:50

One of the things that's so fun is this question is for you Retta, is, is the timing between you and Christina and Mae and there's even moments where, like, if the three of you were in a car, and one person goes up, the other thing goes? And then it was okay. And like, it's all so perfectly timed? And it makes me think, like, Did this just happen? Or was it literally planned out beat by beat half second, by half second? In general, what's it like for you as an actor coming from Parks and Rec, where they were probably 10 of you, in every scene, throwing stuff in? How is it been the timing of three?

Retta 21:28

I think it's, it works, it gives us all a chance. You know, we're pretty scripted, we, we do get some license with, you know, if we feel something's not exactly in the characters voice, you know, we send a quick text to Jenna and Bill to see if it works, but we tend to gel personally. So we, it's a lot easier for us to make the characters gel and like if we do if we go in and do a rehearsal, and one of us feels like something else might work or even in the rehearsal, but you know, either during rehearsal at rehearsal, or between when they're when they're doing lighting, and we have time, a little downtime, before we actually go and shoot, we'll tell each other, we'll be like, I think it'd be funnier coming from Annie, if she said this instead of me, because then I can react like this. Because remember, when I did whatever, and we'll send a text and see if that fits. And if they're like, it's cool that we do it. But so we kind of get it, we get the characters.

So reactions are our own. You know, dialogue is written, and, and some direction is written as to reaction. But we tend to do our own thing. And I think that's our, that's, that's what people see on screen is how we click and so when, you know, like, I feel like Mae is the perfect person between me and Christina, because she cracks us both up. And we all have different similarities, like Christina and I are very similar, when it comes to certain things. And Mae and Christina, are very similar when it comes to certain things. And then Mae and I are, you know, we so we each have these, and then we make fun of each other, when they fall outside of whatever is the thing that the other to get. And so we make fun of each other a lot. And there's a lot of ribbing, if you will. And so we kind of will take that on screen as well, you know, we tend to make fun of Annie. And when you know it's there's a scene written where we're both like, really, it's so much easier to play because we make fun of each other so much when we're you know, when we have our downtime.

Jenna Bans 24:03

Transcript

By the way, Retta, Christina just told us about a conversation you guys had as yourselves about that will totally putting in the show. This kind of thing happens all the time. So Christina ordered...I'm probably telling the story wrong. Christina ordered a crepe. There was a crepe truck on set. And she was like, Oh, I'm gonna get a crepe. And Retta had some reaction like you're going to eat chicken and egg together? And she's like, why would I chicken and egg together?

Retta 24:36
Mother and Child!

Jenna Bans 24:42
And Mae jumped in with something and I was like, that is so a conversation the actual characters would have if you know Beth ordered a chicken and egg crepe and yeah, we already put it on the board. Yeah it's going in this season already because it made us laugh. So they really like so much. I mean You know, Retta just said it. But I think, they're such good friends off screen. And I think that chemistry always translates.

Bill Krebs 25:07
When we're in post, I mean to what Retta is saying a lot of times their energy so good that we often find ourselves cutting our own dialogue because a look from Retta, or a reaction from Mae is so much funnier than anything we wrote and...

Jenna Bans 25:20
And says the moment better than we did. Basicallly.

Bill Krebs 25:23
Because they actually got they got what the best part of the scene was more so than the words that we wrote.

Dave Karger 25:31
Lisa, I have a question for you about the marketing and the consumption of Good Girls. Because I think, unlike I think, again, it's unlike any show that I can think of on NBC, you have some of the Dick Wolf kind of stuff where every hour is very self contained. Then you even have a show like this is us, which does have story arcs, but many different story arcs that come and go, you know, and get more prominence at certain points in the season. I feel like a show like Good Girls reminds me almost of Ozark, where it really is the one overarching story arc that propels the show. So what kind of I mean, you think about the when you guys debuted the show, you had a trailer for the show, it felt like a trailer for a movie. And it makes sense to me that a lot of people are watching girls, I would imagine on Netflix, because the first couple seasons are on Netflix. So how did you go about marketing the show at the outset? And how have you guys pushed different ways for people to consume the show because the show is a little bit different.

Lisa Katz 26:32

Transcript

I think what we're finding being on a broadcast network is we are the starting place for many shows. And then they go on to live very long, long lives on digital. And that's the you know, case for some of our comedies many of our comedies, but good place Brooklyn Nine-Nine and also for the dramas and Good Girls has been such a good example of something that again, you know, launched on NBC and I think we promoted the...I mean, I think the thing that draws people to the show is the characters, the tone, a concept, all things that we marketed towards. But I think also, because of the serialized storytelling, it's so I think it's something that people love to watch and consume in chunks on a, you know, Hulu or on Netflix, and it goes on Netflix. So I think that, you know, this business is becoming so complicated and shows that we look at a show from its linear rating, its digital rating. And we also found that the Netflix audience drove people to watch it back, not necessarily on broadcast, but digitally when we came back a year later. So we're finding that it's all part of the same ecosystem. I'm just really proud that it started with us.

Dave Karger 27:55

I get it. Um Retta, you've touched on this a little bit. But in a general sense, just as an actor, what would you say, this show and this role have allowed you to do that maybe you haven't had the chance to do with other parts of your career, other roles in your career?

Retta 28:12

Um, I it was, I saw it when I read the pilot, I knew exactly who the person was, it was a fully formed character. I knew I knew exactly what I wanted the relationship to be with her husband, Stan. Like, I just saw everything. Whereas in other parts, there's, I mean, I've only been, you know, serialized to other shows where I did more than one season. And I felt like I was kind of, you know, figuring it out based on what the writers gave me. And I but with this, I saw the character as a fully formed human being there, there are actors who can create backstory, and you know, that thing where they're like, what were you doing just before that...I'm not that actor. I'm not, you know, I'm not that touchy feely. Like, I'm like, tell me what happened to me. Which What did you do? Okay, got it. I'll play that. But this was the first time I read something. And I was like, I know her and, and I don't know if it's, it's not necessarily I know her because she's someone in my life. Or, you know, or she's me. I just, I guess I watch enough TV and I know enough about the spectrum of women in the world that I could pluck exactly who she was out just on the pilot and granted in the pilot, you know, she was going through hell, you know, she had a sick daughter and and that alone gives you so much information about the character, but for me, it was obvious who she was.

Dave Karger 30:04

Hmmm I like that. Here's a question for all of you, I'm going to have Bill and Jenna answer it first. Obviously, no matter what any of us do for work, the pandemic has created so many challenges. Can you guys each tell me a challenge that this pandemic has created that you've figured out how to overcome? And what's the challenge that you're still figuring out and working on?

Bill Krebs 30:32

Transcript

Personally or creatively, or like?

Dave Karger 30:35

Whatever comes to mind? Probably professionally. You don't have to get too crazy.

Bill Krebs 30:41

I'm having a lot of challenges day to day. Trying to think I mean,

Jenna Bans 30:46

I think the writers room just yeah, just being over Zoom...

Bill Krebs 30:49

...and production, which hasn't started yet. But I mean, both of those. Yeah, I mean, a writers room works, it's like an organism where you have all these writers who are sitting in a circle, and you're kind of it's a sanctuary, you're confessing all your darkest secrets. And you never know where an idea is going to come from when when you're telling stories, and you're just going around around. And with zoom, as you can see, just from this, it's like you're facing forward, and there's sort of a formality to it, and it doesn't feel as natural. So it's harder to kind of pull stuff out of people and be more casual, because there's just this whole presence is different,

Jenna Bans 31:25

I think. I think it's Yeah, I think it's the type of thing that probably translate. I mean, I don't know, but I'm guessing it translates better to in a boardroom type situation or executive meeting type situation. But yeah, the writers room is this very intimate place where where we literally take things from people's lives that have happened to them,

Bill Krebs 31:46

you're stuck with this group in a giant cramped, you know, a cramped place for 12 hours a day. Yeah, and that for months, and, you know, you you just you learn every single thing about a person. And it's, I mean, Jenna and I recognized early on, when the lot shut down at Universal that we were going to have a problem creatively, because we do everything together. And like we're, our dynamic works in very much the same way. And so we actually quarantined both our families sort of together and early on. And so we knew we'd be able to finish out the season, which we still had to do, and then also start for season four. Because on zoom, it's just too...There's too much personal stuff in in these episodes to kind of get it or to be on zoom for 12 hours a day. We don't do that. Yeah.

Jenna Bans 32:39

And then the other side to it, I think, which we haven't totally figured out yet is production and how that's gonna work. You know, how you can have 100 person crew 150 crew on a stage and keep everybody safe, you know, including the actors who can't wear masks. So that's all sort of a work in progress. And there are way smarter people than us working on that. But um, yeah, I think it's gonna come with a lot of challenges

Transcript

Bill Krebs 33:05

creatively, too, because there, there'll be things we won't be allowed to do, probably, and how do you we don't know that yet. So we're writing now. And so we have to write and we've actually said, Well, how do we produce this, we're like, well, we don't do that, then maybe we could do B or C, you know, and so we were kind of coming up with other alternatives in our head already, in case we're not allowed to do something,

Jenna Bans 33:26

which honestly, isn't the most creative, free way to write either, you know, we find ourselves getting two scenes going like, Oh, we can do it on the backlot,

we really should minimize locations because of COVID. So maybe we can shoot this here and actually change the sort of, you know, tone of the scene to fit to be more COVID precaution friendly, and it feels very, whereas not ideal. And

Bill Krebs 33:50

what we normally do is we reach for the sky and write whatever we want. And then we lay it on our line producer to go figure it out. Yeah. Yeah.

Dave Karger 34:00

So I mean, can you even write a scene with Mae, Christina and Retta in a car right now, or?

Bill Krebs 34:07

that's been discussed? I mean, yeah, we are, we are, but that we talk about that all the time. You know, we're hoping that by the time production comes around, there'll be you know, more testing, there'll be more things that will enable you know, more protocols in place that will enable those types of things to happen.

Jenna Bans 34:24

Yeah, cuz I don't think you can do the show without you know, those three. The show is those three women together in a room or a car, like wherever they are. It's not them 10 feet apart, in masks. So it's, it's you know, I think it's a challenge we're just gonna have to figure out and and figure out a way to make it work while keeping people safe.

Dave Karger 34:45

So Lisa, for you, I mean, your day must be consumed with these conversations on your slate in general and on the specific challenges of every show that you have in production, what's that been like?

Lisa Katz 35:04

Um, awesome. Now, it's I mean, the studios are doing more of the heavy lifting and planning, but what we're struggling with is we still have a schedule. And we need to program things and know what's coming. And nobody knows. So I think it's about everybody, you know, preparing

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and hoping for the best and coming up with contingency plans. In the event, we aren't able to shoot when everybody ideally would like to we just greenlit eight episodes of a show that will be shot in a very COVID friendly way. So I think that some of the things that it's doing is inspiring some innovation and some different ideas that we're experimenting with. But at the end of the day, like people come to TV for the characters, they love these characters, and we need to deliver that. So figuring out how to do that safely, as soon as possible is pretty much what takes up all of our time.

Dave Karger 36:11

How are you coping, Retta as a performer, not being able to perform in the ways that you're used to?

Retta 36:18

Oh, it's the worst. I mean, we you know, Christina, Mae, and I text each other every other day, like I miss you guys. I wish you guys What is this, but also not wanting to be in a, you know, unsafe environment. And I my thing is, is I don't I know them, we're all scaredy cats on the same level. So I don't fear going back to work with them. You know, it's the randos that we're going to have to deal with, like, we don't know what everybody's doing. So I know there's going to be protocols in place. And once those are done, we'll see. And hopefully we're like, Okay, I'm cool with it. What I've been doing, I got my first commercial voiceover job. Look at me diversifying.

Jenna Bans 37:10

You get to do it from home?

Retta 37:15

No the setup was for a podcast that I'm doing for the suffragists... It's a congressional council, but it's about the suffragettes. So that's what that setup was. No, the commercial voiceover stuff I actually did in a studio. And so, you know, they had their protocols in place. And they were like, what, can you come in tomorrow? I was like, Yeah, I can't trust this gonna be cleaned by tomorrow. So maybe Tuesday. That kind of thing. Because, again, I don't want to put myself in jeopardy. So that, you know, that's different, you know, auditioning. A lot of people have been auditioning, I'm like, y'all auditioning on zoom, really. Um, but, you know, just finding different things to, you know, keep you busy and try to earn.

Dave Karger 38:20

Given the fact that we have a lot of people watching this right now that are either current Duke students or young alums. I want to get some thoughts from the four of you guys on how people can navigate the job search, you know, if people want to be a writer's assistant, or a PA. I mean, it's so hard anyway. And right now, what's shooting and what staffing and what writers rooms are happening even on zoom? Not that there's a magic solution for any of these questions. But I'll start with you, Bill. And Jenna, do you guys have thoughts on ways that people can try to break in right now, in this crazy time?

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Bill Krebs 39:04

Now is tough, because we're not allowed to have...I mean, we're not we're everything's over zoom, and so do to be an assistant, which is basically how, you know, pretty much how you break into the world of it. There, there aren't a lot of things for assistance to do right now, because we're all sort of self-sufficient out of our own homes.

Jenna Bans 39:25

In general, I think there's still you know, you I guess now, you got to just write letters, email. I mean, I started out, you know, working at an agency as an as an agency assistant, just to sort of learn the business. And from there, you know, I parlayed it into more of the writing world, but I would say I think a lot of young people come out here and they're like, I have to be a writers assistant. I have to be in a writers room like right away and there are so many assistant jobs that give you a taste of the business without necessarily You know, needing those jobs that are so sort of fought after. I mean, I know people that have assisted casting directors. And then once you're in the world, that's how you make contacts. And it's much easier to then transition to where you want to be more. So I would say like, Don't limit yourself to shows.

Bill Krebs 40:15

I would say like, Don't limit yourself to shows. Yeah, it's not COVID times. Absolutely. I mean, our writers, one of our writers assistants actually came from our production in Atlanta season one, he was a production assistant, which had nothing to do with the writers room. He was 1000s of miles from us. But we were going back and forth to Atlanta. And he just kept expressing how much he wanted to be a writer and use a really hard worker. And we offered him at the end of the season, if he wanted to move to LA that he could be an assistant, you know, in the writers room. And so he he did it. Yeah, he took the risk and came out. And he's still he's now Jenna's assistant. Actually.

Jenna Bans 40:55

I also love your story. I mean, this is not for COVID times because it involves socialization, but you how you did it, you were like, I went to every I moved to LA and went to every party, I could get it.

Bill Krebs 41:05

I mean, did you do have to move to LA is the problem. I think that's what I tell, you know, people, I'm from Michigan, originally, and I tell anyone from back there, you can't do it from afar, I have a lot of people said, I'm just going to keep my day job in Michigan or wherever. And I'm going to write a script. And when it's perfect, I'm going to then send it to someone and they're going to want to offer me a job and then I'll move out. I've never seen that happen. Maybe it happens, you know, once in you know, 100 years or whatever, but it you have to move out here and everything's so serendipitous. You never know when an opportunity is gonna arise and to what Jenna said, when I moved out here, I didn't know anyone. And I just made myself available for anything or anyone that I met if I was at Starbucks, and I met someone and they said, Oh, I'm having a house party, and I went to that party and I met all

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those people met from that. I met someone else and went to another party. And I just kept going and kept going. Because you just never know. Did you get your first job though? Yeah.

And then I met my, I went to part and I met a producer named Barry Josephson at a party and was telling what I wanted to do. And he said, I actually have two shows that are about to go. He said, Why don't you come tomorrow and and talk, you know, with me more in detail. And I went and talked with him. And I got on one of his shows as a as a writers, PA, and that, that that was head cases. That was my Yeah, yeah, that's right. That's head cases. And then and then I went to bones after that. And how I got on bones. Unfortunately, the show was on got canceled.

And about six months later, I had a friend who was a writers pa on bond season one. And he called me and he said, I got another job somewhere else. I don't remember what show it was on. He said, so I'm going to quit. And he said, uh, he said, but if you come, I'm going to give you a drive on for the lot. We'll get lunch together. I'm going to quit at lunch. And then when they get mad that I'm quitting, I'm going to tell him that my your your mind replacement, and you can set are so good. So I sat in his office, he went and he quit. And then he said Oh, and Bill's right outside. And I walked into the writers room and I'm like, I'm ready to start like, okay, and I had my laptop and I literally started at minute on Boeing totally on Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that's a lot of it's just being out here. And you never know where it's gonna come from. And then, and just really saying yes to everything, meaning people.

Dave Karger 43:39

Want one more for you, Bill and Jenna. So if, if three important factors for if we're in your guy's mind when you're looking for, say a writer's assistant, if three important factors are their personality, in as much as you know it, or can tell from an interview, or if you've been on the set with them, their experience, and their actual writing sample that they have given you. Rank them in importance?

Jenna Bans 44:09

Easy. Yeah. Personality. 100%, If not number one, it's like number I don't even think the other two are...

Bill Krebs

I had a friend who worked on Boardwalk Empire and Terry winters who ran that show, he told him something that I think is totally true. He said the one thing I look for in almost any writer anyone work for is hangability. Can this person hang out? Can this person be you have to be with these people for 12 hours a day. It's like jury duty. You can basically fake that for a week. But when you have to be in a room for five months with someone, you've got to be able to know how to hang out. And that's always an avoidance of it. You can learn and no one's there's very few prodigies out there who are going to write a perfect script anyway.

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And so it's, we always say that being a writer, it's an apprenticeship, when you're, you're learning everything as you go along. So it's you're never gonna do it. Typically, so we never expect those scripts to be good or great.

Dave Karger 45:07

Got it. Okay, and what about you, Lisa? What are you telling students and alums now who are asking you for advice on the kind of entry level stuff?

Lisa Katz 45:15

Um, similar to what Bill said, I think, first of all, I already think people are so ahead of me, I say this, whenever I speak to things that do, I didn't know, I wanted to be in the business. I had no idea. I'm from Los Angeles. But I, I knew nothing. I didn't take any classes and enjoy the internships. I mean, I came home because I lived in Los Angeles and needed a place to live. And I needed an entry level job because I needed to make a car payment. And I was like, well, entertainment seems better than, you know, being a hostess, not that there's anything wrong with being a hostess.

So I just got an entry level job at an agency. And then I started to understand the business and what it is. And I was like, Oh, I think the TV people feel more down to earth than the feature people, I'll do TV. And then I said, I was just that same thing. That Bill said, I just met tons of people and constantly told people, what I was interested in and so much about is putting yourself on the line and just continuing to push and push and push and not expect things to happen. Immediately, I can count the number of times, like, weekly, I would call my parents and be like, I'm going back to school, this is a joke, I have no idea what I'm doing here. And then invariably, a couple weeks later, something would happen or an opportunity would present itself.

So it's you have to pay your dues, you have to be open to different things. And the job you have isn't necessarily the job you're gonna end up with. But you'll learn a lot, you'll meet people. And I think to bill and Jenna's point, it's just like being open and just like saying yes, and doing the things maybe other people don't want to do like this. This is amazing job, I get to work with incredibly talented people, but I just do a lot of crappy stuff before. And I always volunteered, and I always made myself known.

And so it just, you have to be patient, but it worked out. And I think, again, in this time, it's a little challenging, but I do think because people are locked down. If you reach out to people and you say, do you have 10 minutes to jump on the phone? Can I send you a few questions, I think people are willing to do it, because honestly, what else are they doing right now? Anything but, um, so I think it's just, you know, been having a lot of initiative and being proactive and being patient.

Dave Karger 47:37

I love it. Read or what would you recommend people who are interested in whether it's being a performer or any part of the entertainment business? What would you tell people to spend

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their time doing, especially now, when people as Lisa saying, Do have kind of more time on their hands?

Retta 47:55

Um, well, now it's hard because for me, I agree its proximity, you're not going to do it, outside of LA, or New York. And I don't even I don't even know New York, like, I don't even get it. So I don't even know how you want New Yorkers do it. I feel like an to Lisa's point, you're gonna have to do some crappy stuff before you get to do what you really want. And sometimes, you learn what you really want, you go in with one idea, and you find out something different. Like one of the things that I like for me. So I got a new assistant. And she's really, she's really good. She'd be a great producer.

So in the back of my mind, I'm like, when I get my production company going, she is for sure. Going to be, you know, somewhat important, because I know, she's innovative. I know, she's a self starter. And I know that kind of personality that I'd want to be around and, and feel comfortable saying, I need you to handle this and I can walk away with it and think she's going to handle it. So you know, being someone's assistant. It can be a tough to I'm a great boss, but it can be a tough job. But if you show your abilities, you can it can move you to something better there. I've said many times I've heard people you know, they were an assistant for someone and then their friend, you know, the friend is like, I'm starting this company, I need to ask like well, I love my assistant, but she'd be great and they let them basically take their assistant because I feel like people go through a system people tend to move on they, you know, they they accrue these skills and they can move on to bigger and better jobs.

And there are people who are like, take this person she would be perfect she deserves. It keeps She because I've only had girls as my assistant, but it's just just get in the room some kind of way, get in the Hollywood rooms, some kind of way, whether it be going to other parties that you get invited to, and, and just be someone who other people don't mind being around. Because for sure, no one's going to want to be stuck with someone who's a jerk, you know, so be your best self and just be visible. But also, no specific, if you're a writer, you got to keep writing and that kind of thing. But just just be, yeah, hangoutable.

Bill Krebs 50:41

I like I would add one more thing I would say it doesn't, it also doesn't matter what you do is your job. When you come out here like, as long as you're sort of inside the gates, or like you're doing anything relative or related to entertainment, it's more or less how you do it. So like, if you're getting coffee, or you're you have to get lunch. And obviously everyone here goes to Duke and they're way above doing any of that, because those are jobs that seem like, you know, way above what are way below what they would be doing from a Duke, you know, education. If you do that very well.

And you you care every time you do it. It's amazing how like the dividends it pays like we always tell time like we some of our assistants who are just so like with it and anticipate things and just the most mundane things that they are way above. They do it so well that we want to read

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their scripts, we want to help them because they care so much. And they make our lives easy. And what seems like a simple like are nothing way but working 12 hours a day. And you know, lunchtime rolls around, and lunch is there on time and the orders perfect. I mean, it sounds like the most trivial thing, but it just means the world to us. It ruins your day when you trust that way.

So in a lot, and I think the mistake people make is they're like, No, I'm better than this, I'm going to prove how much better I am than getting lunch or getting coffee or doing whatever. And then they they neglect getting the coffee or lunch because they want to show what a great writer they are. And that's backwards. And it's like, we already assume you're going to be good at that we need you to do this other thing and the fact that you've done it so well it tells me you're going to be good at a lot of things to what Retta is saying about her assistant...

Jenna Bans 52:24

it just endears you to them, and then you want to help them and you've done that for them getting them that next best job. So that's great. Yeah, miss it a lot. Yeah.

Dave Karger 52:36

Okay, a couple last things before we wrap this up. I have one more question for you guys, Bill and Jenna. You know, we've talked about how the pandemic has kind of uprooted everything, obviously, all of the kind of seismic changes and discussions about racial inequality, both in the entertainment industry and the world at large. How is that affecting how you are going about the planning of your upcoming season?

Jenna Bans 53:01

Hmm, that's a good question. I mean, I think, you know, I mean, we always, were always sort of thinking that, you know, like, yeah, we always try to, you know, think of good girls both off screen in the writers room. And, you know, on the page as representing the world, we see, you know, I used to work for Shonda Rhimes, who was one of the first sort of big show runners to she, she got a lot of press for, like, you know, I remember when the Grey's Anatomy cast, you know, was cast for season. And there was, and it seems so dated now. But there was like a big sort of reaction to the fact that she had so many people of color in that cast. And she was like, I'm just, she's like, to me, that's not a big deal at all. I'm literally writing the world I live in. And that struck me so much as like a young writer then that she wasn't making some big statement. I mean, she was, but she wasn't intentionally making some big statements. She was literally reflecting as a storyteller, the world she saw. So, I mean, I know I've always tried to sort of carry that with me in terms of casting in terms of representation in terms of the stories we tell and, you know, especially always

Bill Krebs 54:19

come from like, an empowering place.

Jenna Bans 54:21

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And especially now I think, in the writers room, you know, we do do, you know, we've sort of dipped our toe, even with standard movie stories, like, we've done some stories about race, and I never want those stories to be, you know, crafted by a right white person, they should be crafted by a person of color who's experienced those stories. And, and we've always come from that place in the writers room, too. So I think

Bill Krebs 54:47

a lot of those stories do come from personal experiences.

Jenna Bans 54:50

Yeah, they do. I mean, I remember we did. We did a whole standard Ruby thing where Yeah, Stan was talking about how he had to have this Talk with his little his son on the show Harry about what it means to be a young black boy versus a white boy when you know the cops pull you over. And that came from a writer of color in our room who had that talk with her son, and it was something none of us could have experience have experienced. And anyway, I think it's important to you know, really have those voices represented in your writers room, especially now, but it's always been important when we're everybody's been paying attention.

Bill Krebs 55:31

And we want them to be real so they're relatable and not you know, crafted. Yeah, no, yeah. Yeah.

Dave Karger (Zoom audio issue)

Obviously, it's early days on this, but have you seen shifts in the conversations that people are having with you, guys that are being are being presented? Or are we going wait to see dividends?

Retta 55:48

Okay, your sound is really weird. Um, but I did hear what you said. I'm there. For years, I have been in a position where I'm like, I know, as a black woman, my negotiating power is different. And, and I bring it up, but I never fight. And this is the first year that I was like, You know what, fuck this shit. Now everybody hears it, they get it, they see it, they know it, it's not fucking bullshit. Be aware of it. And I've like been like, a fucking crazy person with my manager on the phone. I was like, and I know, it's crazy to say, cuz my bosses are on but I was like, I'm sorry. I'm fucking done. I'm like, I've worked for this company. 12 years. So I finally got my voice in this. So it is different. There. It's been a tough being stuck in my under Christ being stuck in my house and seeing all this shit. Knowing having known it for years, and people, seeing people being like, Oh, my God, I had no idea. And I'm like, What have people been screaming?

Like, what have you heard when people have been screaming all this time. And I mean, that's just the broad, just in general, that's the, you know, me going to fucking Target and having to deal with someone. And I know, it's coming from a racial place. And I just have to be like, she's a crazy person, let me walk away, because otherwise, you're going to go to fucking jail, because I'm going to choke this bitch out right now. That's just life. So when it came to work, you're like,

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you need to work, just let it go. It's fine. And this is the first year that I've been like, I'm done. So it's different. It's different this year. And we'll see, you know, how it plays out, you know, in my career and black careers, and how people stand up for themselves and what have you. Um, but I'm hoping, you know, this is the shift, just in general just in life, and not having to put up with shit. And people being like, What the fuck are you talking about?

Dave Karger 58:17 (Zoom audio issues)

Claim your power. That's what I have to say. I hope I hope my sound is better, by the way. But thank you for that. Thank you for that. Let me end with the two minutes we have left. totally going to switch gears. I want all four of you guys to recommend something that's available right now, on TV or on a streaming service that maybe most people haven't heard of, what's something that's out there that you would want to recommend to people?

Lisa Katz, I'm going to start with you.

Lisa Katz 58:46

I knew you were gonna do that. Um, I mean, I can just say that I don't have a lot of the irony is I don't have a lot of time to watch television. Because once I've watched and read all of the shows that were involved in, which I love, so thank goodness, I like them because it takes a lot of time. I also have small children that are home all the time now and require attention and education. So that being said, the one thing I did recently watch that I loved was Normal People. But I think that's okay. It could be the same as they were sure. And so just it was so intimate and character driven. And I loved it. Okay, yeah,

Bill & Jenna 59:39

Same as ours!!! Same. That was ours.

Dave Karger

Alright, that's good. That's great. You guys are simpatico. OK Retta, finish this up.

Retta 59:47

Tonight, I haven't given a lot of time to new things being stuck being stuck in the house. You can't Have one comforting so I've gone back to things that I love. And so I just I'm almost finished with the good wife again. You know, I I've been watching Parks you know, I enjoyed Parks, but it's nice to be so far away from it. And then to go back, I just started back with Curb. I'm going back to things that I enjoyed. Just because it makes you feel at home, it makes it feel a little bit normal. You know, I started I May Destroy You. Oh, yeah, I just started it. So I haven't I don't even know if I like it yet. So that's, that's the only new thing other than, you know, like Killing Eve, you know, other than new things that are still that I started a while ago and are into second and third seasons. That's the first new thing that I've done. But I like such Sex Education on Netflix. I don't I'm the worst because people always ask me what I'm watching and I never remember. And then I get off whatever call interview meeting. And then I'm like, oh my god. Watch and I just never remember but the Good Wife just really been keeping me together.

Dave Karger 1:01:23

Transcript

You did great. So listen, guys, we're out of time. I want to thank Retta and Jen and Bill and Lisa again. And Amy Unell, you're just a rock star. And thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Retta, Lisa, Bill and Jenna for just taking an hour of your time to do this. So thank you. All right. Bye, everybody. Enjoy the rest of your night. Bye.

OUTRO: Dave Karger 1:02:02

That's it for this episode of DEMAN Live. I'm DAVE KARGER, DEMAN is a signature program of Duke Arts and Duke Alumni Engagement and Development. Follow DEMAN on social and stay updated at Duke DEMAN, that's d e m. a n.com, where you can find our full archive of episodes. Thanks so much for joining us. See you next time.

This episode was produced by me Lilly Clark in collaboration with Hear at Duke, Duke's student run podcast hub. Our theme song is Carolina by Cameron Tompkins.

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