



A POLITICAL

AN OHH MAYBE SHORT FILM

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey turtleneck and brown suspenders, is laughing heartily. She has several rings on her fingers. Next to her, a man with long curly hair, wearing a dark blue patterned shirt, is also laughing and looking towards her. They are seated at a table with a white tablecloth. In front of them are several glasses and bottles, including a large bottle of beer. The background shows a dimly lit room with a lamp and a potted plant.

LOGLINE

A CELEBRATORY DINNER PARTY UNRAVELS WHEN THE GUESTS FIND OUT THE HOST DOESN'T FOLLOW THE NEWS.

SYNOPSIS

APOLITICAL, WRITTEN AND REALIZED BY MISHU HILMY, IS A SHORT COMEDY ABOUT A DINNER PARTY UNRAVELLING ONCE THE GUESTS FIND OUT THE HOST DOESN'T FOLLOW THE NEWS.

TAKE SEAT AT A TABLE WHERE WINE FLOWS AND INTELLECTUAL SPARKS IGNITE. A GATHERING AMONG NEW FRIENDS AND FUTURE CREATIVE COLLABORATORS TAKES A FAST TURN AS LAUGHTER MORPHS INTO AN IDEOLOGICAL DUEL.

ALEX (HALVERSON), THE FERVENT 'ART AS A FORCE FOR REVOLUTION' CHAMPION, SQUARES OFF WITH MORGAN (MATHEW), THE NEWS-AVERSE AND SELF-PROCLAIMED "APOLITICAL" INFLUENCER.

AS ALEX AND MORGAN JOUST, THEIR RESPECTIVE PARTNERS LENNI (WILHELM) AND CASEY (BELLANTONE), ARE NOT AFRAID TO PULL AT THE CONVERSATIONAL LEVERS.

LENNI IS A SUPPORTIVE AND EMPATHETIC CONFIDANTE, WHO VALUES THE VULNERABILITY AND COURAGE OF ALEX'S ARTISTIC JOURNEY. CASEY, ON THE OTHER HAND, ADDS HER CANDID AND PRAGMATIC VOICE TO THE MIX—PARTLY FUELED BY BELT AFTER BELT OF WINE STRAIGHT FROM THE BOTTLE—WITH A PENCHANT FOR CUTTING THROUGH THE ABSTRACT AND EXPOSING HYPOCRISY.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION OF APOLITICAL: WHAT IS THE DUTY OF AN ARTIST? HERE, EMOTIONS SURGE, TRUTHS TUMBLE, AND THE SYMPHONY OF IDEAS AND SELF-DECEPTION RISE TO A ALCOHOL FUELED CRESCENDO.

DIRECTORS STATEMENT

I HAD A PROBLEM—I USED TO SPEND HOURS READING THE NEWS, DIVING INTO DOMESTIC POLITICS: CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY, SUPREME COURT BRIEFS, EVEN OBSCURE PRIMARIES. I OFTEN WONDERED IF LIFE WOULD BE BETTER WITHOUT THIS CONSTANT NEWS BARRAGE. AMID THIS BRAIN FRIED FOG, I CAN'T PINPOINT WHAT TRIGGERED ME TO WRITE "APOLITICAL," BUT I DO KNOW THAT FOR A WHILE I WANTED TO DIRECT A DINNER SCENE.

BUT I WROTE VARIOUS SCRIPTS WITHOUT LUCK: ONE DRAFT HAD SIX PEOPLE ARGUING ABOUT PROBLEMATIC ARTISTS, WHILE ANOTHER STEMMED FROM A REAL INCIDENT: MY PARTNER AND I AIDING A STRUNG-OUT PERSON ON THE SIDEWALK, STRUGGLING TO COMMUNICATE. THIS SPARKED THOUGHTS ON RELATIONSHIPS CRUMBLING OVER DIFFERING VIEWS ON RESPONSIBILITY.

THREADS FROM THE FAILED DRAFTS EVENTUALLY MERGED TO FORM "APOLITICAL." CAPTURING MY CORE INTENT TO DIRECT A DINNER SCENE BUT NOW CLARIFIED WITH THEMES OF SOMEONE ACTUALLY BELIEVING IN DIRECT ACTION VERSUS SOMEONE WHO IS THE KEEPER OF THEIR OWN AMBITION. AND USING NOT READING THE NEWS HAPPENED TO BE THE CATALYST TO GETTING INTO IT.

THE CHARACTERS IN "APOLITICAL," ARE HONESTLY LIKE SNIPPETS OF THE CONVERSATIONS I WRESTLE WITH IN MY MIND. THEIR BACK-AND-FORTHS MIRROR MY SLEEPLESS NIGHTS, PERPETUAL OVERTHINKING: BETTER THE WORLD VS. THE DAILY TO-DO LIST, ACTION VS. INDIFFERENCE.

I'M HOPING THE AUDIENCE WILL BE DRAWN INTO APOLITICAL'S MOMENTS OF HEATED DISCUSSIONS AND QUIET SUBTEXTS, FEELING LIKE THEY'RE EAVESDROPPING ON A GENUINE INTERACTION. AS THEY WATCH THE CHARACTERS ARGUE ABOUT RESPONSIBILITY, ART'S PURPOSE, AND PERSONAL VALUES, I'M CURIOUS IF THEY START THINKING ABOUT THEIR OWN BELIEFS, MAYBE EVEN SPARKING SOME SPICY POST-SCREENING CONVERSATIONS.

I'LL BE GRATEFUL IF AN AUDIENCE SEES THEMSELVES IN THESE CHARACTERS – WHETHER IT'S THE PASSION OF ALEX, THE INDIFFERENCE OF MORGAN, OR THE HEALTHY SKEPTICISM OF LENNI AND CASEY. THAT RELATABILITY, THAT "I'VE BEEN THERE" FEELING, IS WHAT I'M EXCITED TO OFFER UP. AND OF COURSE, I HOPE THEY FIND IT AS FUNNY AS I DO.

PRODUCTION & CREATIVE PROCESS NOTES

“APOLITICAL” WAS REHEARSED AND SHOT OVER THE COURSE OF TWO DAYS. THERE WERE TWO - TWO HOUR REHEARSALS, THEN THE FOLLOWING WEEK WE DID TWO A SEVEN HOUR SHOTS. COVERING A 13 PAGE SCRIPT.

THE SCRIPT ITSELF WAS WRITTEN AND THEN REWRITTEN OVER THE COURSE OF THREE WEEKS ONCE THE CAST WAS SET. OVER 1,100 PEOPLE SENT IN HEADSHOTS FOR THE FOUR ROLES. 150 OR SO WERE INVITED TO SEND IN 1-MINUTE MONOLOGUE SELF-TAPES.

I WAS EXCITED TO FINALLY GET TO WORK WITH CINEMATOGRAPHER LUIS TREVIÑO. I HAD SEEN ONE OF HIS SHORT FILMS 2 OR 3 YEARS PRIOR ON INSTAGRAM, AND WE'D CHAT INTERMITTENTLY. SO WHEN I REACHED OUT AND HIS SCHEDULE WORKED OUT THAT WAS GREAT. I LOVE LUIS'S ABILITY TO FOCUS ON THE MOST COMPELLING ELEMENTS OF A STATIC ENVIRONMENT, WHICH ARE THE FACE SOF THOSE INVOLVED. WORKING WITH OUR GAFFER, JEREMY APPLEBAUM, LUIS WAS ABLE TO FIND THE RIGHT DEGREE OF SOFT AND DECEPTIVELY INVITING LIGHTING. BUT THE WARMTH WAS A TRAP THAT WOULD EVENTUALLY TURN BLEAK.

I HAD NEVER WORKED WITH C.J. ARELLANO BEFORE, BUT I DID SEE THEIR WORK “GRIFFICA” A YEAR OR SO PRIOR, AND SOMEHOW LUCKED INTO HAVING MY CALL FOR AN EDITOR GET FORWARDED TO THEM. IT WAS AN INCREDIBLE COLLABORATION AS THEY WENT THROUGH HOURS OF FOOTAGE AND COVERAGE TO KEEP REFINING THE PIECE INTO ARGUMENT DRIVEN FORCE. WE KEPT RETURNING TO THE IDEA THAT THERE CAN'T BE ANY MUSIC, THE DIALOGUE HAS TO BE THE MELODY. AND BECAUSE C.J. ALSO COMES FROM A COMEDY BACKGROUND LIKE ME, WE WERE VERY EASY TO LOCK INTO A CUTTING TEMPO AND KILL ALL DARLINGS FOR THE CORE STORY. THE POINT OF VIEW BEING MOSTLY DRIVEN BY ALEX (HALVERSON) AND MORGAN (MATHEW).

QUICKSILVER COLOR'S C.RYAN STEMPLER DID THE COLOR GRADE. WE WANTED TO START THE STORY WITH A DREAMY GLOW, MUCH LIKE THE DREAMY GLOW ONE FEELS AFTER SWEATING THROUGH SEVERAL GLASSES OF WINE. AS THE STORY DESCENDS, THE WARMTH SLOWLY DRAINS FROM THE IMAGE JUST LIKE THE POTENTIAL OF THEIR PARTNERSHIP DRAINS. THE FIRST FRAME, AND FINAL FRAME ARE DRASTICALLY DIFFERENT IN COLOR TONE, BUT WE TRIED TO MAKE THE SHIFT IMPERCEPTIBLE. CURIOUS HOW MANY FOLKS WILL NOTICE!

LASTLY, VICTORIA SALAZAR SUPERVISED THE FINAL SOUND MIX AND MASTER, AND HER WORK WITH NOISEFLOOR LTD WAS ABLE TO CREATE SO MANY NUANCES AURAL MOMENTS THAT HELPED ADD MORE DEPTHS TO THE CONVERSATION. SHE PROGRESSED THE DIMENSION AND DEPTH OFF OF THE INCREDIBLE CUT C.J. DID THROUGH HER NUANCED WORK.

A CONVERSATION WITH THE CAST

MISHU: JUST CURIOUS, I'D LIKE TO START WITH BRADLEY AND BEN. DID YOU FIND YOURSELVES PERSONALLY AGREEING OR DISAGREEING WITH THE VIEWPOINTS YOUR CHARACTERS EXPRESSED IN THE FILM?

BEN MATHEW: I DID FIND MYSELF RELATING TO MORGAN QUITE A LOT, WHICH IS SOMETHING TO FEEL RIGHTFULLY GUILTY OF, BUT IT IS ALSO A REFLECTION OF WHAT A LOT OF PEOPLE FEEL TODAY.

BRADLEY: I DEFINITELY RELATE TO MY CHARACTER (ALEX) IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DEBATE. I AM A PROFESSIONAL ARTIST BECAUSE I BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF ART TO HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE WORLD, AND I ALSO GENERALLY BELIEVE IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS ARTISTS TO USE OUR PLATFORMS.

MISHU: BEN, DO YOU THINK MORGAN'S VIEW WORKS?

BEN MATHEW: LIKE MANY OF US, MORGAN'S APATHETIC APPROACH HAS SEEMED TO PRODUCE DESIRABLE OUTCOMES - A LARGE GRANT, THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK WITH AMAZING ARTISTS, A WORKING ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP, A GENERALLY HAPPY LIFE UNOBSTRUCTED BY THE WOES OF THE WORLD - BUT BY THE END OF THE SHORT, WE GET A GLIMPSE AT JUST HOW UNFULFILLED HE FEELS.

MISHU: WHILE THE CHARACTER ALEX, IS MORE AWARE OF AN ARTIST'S RESPONSIBILITY—

BRADLEY: THIS WAS DEFINITELY SOMETHING I HAD TO PERIODICALLY CHECK MYSELF ON THROUGHOUT MY WORK WITH THE CHARACTER.

MISHU: HOW SO?

BRADLEY: THERE IS ONE SCHOOL OF THOUGHT THAT SAYS YOU SHOULD ALWAYS BELIEVE YOUR CHARACTER IS RIGHT, AND THAT MIGHT BE TRUE IN A SENSE, BUT I THINK IT'S ALSO IMPORTANT TO HAVE THAT SECOND WIDER PERSPECTIVE WHERE YOU CAN LOOK AT THE WORLD AND SEE ALL SIDES TO THE SITUATION.

MISHU: BECAUSE WHAT, IF NOT, A CHARACTER MIGHT BE OVERLY CONFIDENT, OR JUST PLAY ONE NOTE, YEAH?

BRADLEY: OTHERWISE I FEEL LIKE YOU WIND UP WITH A FLAT PORTRAYAL RATHER THAN A NUANCED ONE. SO EVEN THOUGH I WOULD BE ON ALEX'S SIDE IN REAL LIFE, I HAD TO BE SURE TO ZOOM OUT WHEN I COULD AND MAKE SURE I WAS AWARE OF ALEX'S FLAWS AND THEIR OWN BRAND OF TOXICITY THEY BROUGHT TO THE TABLE.

MISHU: TOTALLY, BRINGING DEPTH, COMPLEXITY AND FLAWS—I THINK WITHOUT IT WE'D END UP WITH TALKING HEADS ABOUT ARGUMENTS INSTEAD OF ACTUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF PEOPLE. AND BEN, WITH MORGAN, AT THE SURFACE LEVEL HE SEEMS TO HAVE IT ALL FIGURED OUT. BUT--

BEN MATHEW: HE DOESN'T HAVE ANYTHING OF IMPACT TO CONTRIBUTE, HIS WORLD-VIEW IS QUITE SELFISH, AND HE IS UNABLE TO CONTRIBUTE TO DEEPER CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE DANGEROUS ISSUES WE FACE - ALTHOUGH HE WOULD LIKE TO.

A CONVERSATION CONT'D

MISHU: HOW DID THAT IMPACT YOUR APPROACH?

BEN MATHEW: I CHOSE TO DOUBLE DOWN ON MORGAN'S OBSTINANCE, BECAUSE IT REFLECTS WHAT LENGTHS MANY OF US WOULD GO TO TO MAINTAIN OUR COMFORTABILITY, EVEN WHEN FACED WITH OUR OWN GLARING SHORTCOMINGS AND UNREALIZED POTENTIAL.

MISHU: RIGHT, BUT EVEN WITH PLAYING WITH OBSTINANCE, YOU DID MANAGE TO REVEAL A VULNERABILITY, RIGHT?

BEN MATHEW: I DIDN'T SHY AWAY FROM HOW MUCH ALEX'S WORDS CUT ME, BECAUSE I WANT THE AUDIENCE TO ASK THEMSELVES HOW MUCH SHAME, HURT, AND EMBARRASSMENT THEY WOULD ALLOW THEMSELVES TO GO THROUGH BEFORE MAKING A CHANGE. WOULD MORGAN'S SITUATION HAVE BEEN ENOUGH, OR WOULD THEY REQUIRE MORE?

MISHU: TURNING TO WILL AND KATHERINE, HOW DID YOU BUILD RAPPORT AND CAMARADERIE WITH YOUR CO-STARS TO BRING OUT THE SUCH ENGAGING PERFORMANCES?

KB: I THINK THE KEY TO THIS WAS RUNNING THE SCRIPT MULTIPLE TIMES IN REHEARSALS. I FIND THAT A MAJORITY OF THE TIME IN FILM, YOU DON'T GET REHEARSAL SESSIONS THAT EXTEND LONGER THAN MAYBE A ZOOM READ AND A FEW MINUTES BEFORE FILMING.

MISHU: DO YOU THINK MORE TIME REHEARSING OR WORKING IN A GROUP WITH THE MATERIAL CAN HELP CREATE AN ON-SET CHEMISTRY?

KATHERINE: IT'S WHAT I LOVED/HATED ABOUT MY TIME DOING THEATRE, BUT IN THIS CASE, SINCE THE DYNAMICS WERE SO SPECIFIC AND THERE WERE LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS INVOLVED, IT WAS INCREDIBLY HELPFUL. I FOUND THE OTHER ACTORS A DELIGHT TO WORK WITH AND BEN WAS SO OPEN, NATURAL AND PRESENT TO WHAT I GAVE HIM. DEVELOPING CHEMISTRY WITH HIM FELT EASY.

MISHU: AND WILL, CREATING THAT CONNECTION WITH BRADLEY--

WILL: I HAD THE GREAT FORTUNE TO BE PLAYING OPPOSITE MY VERY CLOSE FRIEND, BRADLEY HALVERSON!

MISHU: WILL, I REMEMBER YOU TOLD ME WHEN YOU SAW THEIR NAME ON THE EMAIL CAST LIST, THAT YOU SCREAMED.

BRADLEY: IT WAS SUCH A PLEASANT SURPRISE TO SEE THEIR NAME IN THAT FIRST EMAIL TO THE CAST. WILL AND I FIRST MET DOING THEATER BACK IN 2015 AND HAVE BEEN GOOD FRIENDS EVER SINCE, BUT THIS WAS OUR FIRST TIME TOGETHER ON A FILM SET!

WILL: SO WE HAD A RAPPORT AND CHEMISTRY COMING INTO THE PROJECT. WE EVEN HELPED EACH OTHER PICK OUT WHAT TO WEAR FOR THE SHOOT AS A COUPLE MIGHT FOR A DINNER PARTY.

BRADLEY: HAVING THAT SHARED HISTORY DEFINITELY GAVE US A HEAD START IN TERMS OF OUR CHARACTER'S CHEMISTRY, GIVEN HOW COMFORTABLE WE ARE WITH EACH OTHER.

MISHU: INTERESTING, HOW DID YOU TWO SYNC UP WHEN IT CAME TO THE OTHER COUPLE ACROSS FROM YOU?

WILL: WHILE BEN AND KATHERINE WERE ESTABLISHING THEIR CHARACTERS' RELATIONSHIPS, BRADLEY AND I GOT TO REALLY WATCH AND OBSERVE AND TRY TO FIGURE OUT WHO THESE PEOPLE WERE AND WHAT THEY WERE ALL ABOUT. IT HONESTLY FIT VERY WELL INTO THE CONTEXT OF THE FILM FOR ME, PERSONALLY.

BRADLEY: I DIDN'T KNOW KATHERINE OR BEN BEFOREHAND, BUT IT WORKED OUT PRETTY WELL AS OUR CHARACTERS WERE ALSO NEW ACQUAINTANCES. LIFE IMITATES ART.

MISHU: HAVE YOU RUN INTO SIMILAR KINDS OF ARGUMENTS LIKE THIS IN YOUR REAL LIFE?

BRADLEY: I DEFINITELY HAVE! ACTUALLY RECENTLY I WAS AT A GATHERING WHEN SOMEONE TALKED ABOUT HOW THEY FELT THEY HAD "OUTGROWN" POLITICS.

MISHU: OOF!

A CONVERSATION CONT'D

BRADLEY: THAT'S NOT EXACTLY THE SAME AS CHOOSING NOT TO READ THE NEWS, BUT IT'S PRETTY DARN SIMILAR!

MISHU: YEAH, WOW, THAT'S A REALLY CLOSE ANALOGUE.

BRADLEY: IN THAT REAL LIFE SITUATION I WAS ALSO SEATED NEXT TO ANOTHER TRANS PERSON, AND WE COULDN'T HELP BUT TAKE ISSUE. HOW CONVENIENT IT MUST BE TO NOT HAVE ONE'S VERY EXISTENCE AND PERSONHOOD INHERENTLY POLITICIZED. I THINK IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT THE PERSON WHO HAD SEEMINGLY "OUTGROWN POLITICS" WAS A CIS, STRAIGHT, WHITE, MAN.

MISHU: NOT SURPRISING. THAT SORT OF ENERGY COMING FROM TYPICAL TYPES. REGARDING THAT, BEN HOW DID YOU APPROACH BALANCING THE COMEDIC ASPECTS OF THE SHORT WITH THE MORE SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHARACTERS AND SUBJECT MATTER—OR THAT SORT OF NAÏVE HETERONORMATIVE ENERGY?

BEN MATHEW: I THINK WE WERE ALL RELATIVELY ON THE SAME PAGE ON HOW TO HANDLE THAT FINE BALANCE, BECAUSE ALTHOUGH IT WAS A DIFFICULT FLIP-FLOP, WE ALL UNDERSTAND THAT THIS TYPE OF INTERACTION IS A LARGE PART OF THE HUMAN CONDITION.

MISHU: LIKE THROWING THINGS OUT THERE, KINDA BLIND?

BEN: WE SO OFTEN GO FROM "HE WAS LITERALLY QUOTING YOU WHEN HE SAID ALL THAT, SO YES, LIKE IT OR NOT, YOU'RE INVOLVED!!" TO "GOD, THAT'S SO AWFUL... HE PARAPHRASED ME!" "OKAY REALLY?" "NO SORRY THIS IS OBVIOUSLY NOT A JOKE, I'M SO SORRY."

MISHU: RIGHT--

BEN: IT HAPPENS ALL THE TIME. WE NEED THAT DEFENSE MECHANISM, WE NEED TO HAVE BALANCE TO STAY IN CONTROL OF AN OFF-THE-RAILS SITUATION. SO, YES, WHILE IT MAY HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT TO REASON AT TIMES AND BALANCE WITH THE HEAVY SUBJECT MATTER, I THINK THE CAST AS AN ENSEMBLE UNDERSTOOD THAT THIS BACK-AND-FORTH IS SO NATURAL TO HUMAN NATURE. ONCE WE UNDERSTOOD THAT, I BELIEVE IT ACTUALLY HELPED OUR FLOW IN THE STORYTELLING.

MISHU: FOR ME IT IS THE MELODY OF THE PIECE. THERE'S NO MUSIC, IT'S JUST THIS ARGUMENT PLAYING OUT. AND FOR YOU BRADLEY—ALCOHOL FUELED SOCIAL SETTINGS CAN SOMETIMES LEAD TO SUPER UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATIONS FOR QUEER INDIVIDUALS, ESPECIALLY IF THEY FACE LIKE MICROAGGRESSIONS OR INTENDED OR UNINTENDED OFFENSIVE COMMENTS. HOW DO YOU THINK THE FILM HANDLES THESE MOMENTS?

BRADLEY: THERE WERE DEFINITELY MOMENTS IN THE SCRIPT THAT FELT HEIGHTENED BY THE CASTING OF WILL AND I. CERTAIN WORD CHOICES OR TACTICS USED BY THE OTHER CHARACTERS JUST HIT A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENTLY WHEN SAID TO TWO TRANS CHARACTERS.

MISHU: TOTALLY--

BRADLEY: THEY WEREN'T NECESSARILY THE FOCUS OF THE SCENE, BUT DEFINITELY ADDED FLAVOR TO CERTAIN BITS OF THE BACK AND FORTH. I DEFINITELY USED THOSE MOMENTS TO HELP FUEL ALEX'S ANNOYANCE AND INDIGNANCE.

MISHU: AGREED, I THINK IT ADDED SOME EXTRA TENSION AND SHADES WITHOUT PULLING FROM THE CORE THRUST OF THE STORY. I AM CURIOUS THOUGH, HOW DO YOU THINK IDENTITY INFORMS CHARACTER, PERFORMANCE, OR APPROACH TO POINT OF VIEW?

BRADLEY: I THINK IDENTITY, AMONG OTHER THINGS, IS THE LENS THROUGH WHICH WE PERCEIVE THE WORLD.

MISHU: OKAY, YES, PLEASE DIVE IN—

BRADLEY: FOR EXAMPLE, ANY CHARACTER I APPROACH, WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE QUEER OR TRANS, IS GOING TO BE REFRACTED THROUGH MY OWN EXPERIENCE AS A QUEER AND TRANS PERSON.

MISHU: LIKE, IMPOSSIBLE TO SEPARATE--

BRADLEY: IT'S PART OF WHAT MAKES ACTING SO PERSONAL AND SPECIAL. NO MATTER HOW MUCH AN ACTOR MAY DISAPPEAR INTO A ROLE, IT'S ALWAYS FILTERED THROUGH OUR OWN PERSONHOOD.

MISHU: RIGHT! RIGHT, THANKS FOR SHARING THAT—AND FOR YOU, KATHERINE, WAS THERE A FAVORITE MOMENT IN THE STORY?

KB: I LOVED THE AWKWARD SHIPWRECK THAT WAS THE ENDING MOMENTS OF THE FILM.

MISHU: HAHA! RIGHT, RIGHT--

KB: THERE WAS NO RESOLUTION. EVERY SINGLE CHARACTER WAS LEFT SIGNIFICANTLY LESS CONFIDENT IN THEMSELVES THAN WHEN THE STORY BEGAN. THERE WAS NO “WINNER” OR “LOSER” ...NO ONE KNEW WHAT TO SAY. AFTER THE FINAL TOAST, ANYTHING ANYONE SAID OR DID FELT VIOLENTLY AWKWARD AND WRONG, AND I LOVED THAT BECAUSE IT WAS SO REAL. AND IT FELT THAT THE CAMERA LINGERED ON US A BIT TOO LONG, LIKE SOMEONE SHOULD HAVE YELLED “CUT” BUT DIDN’T, LIKE YOU WERE SEEING SOMETHING YOU WEREN’T SUPPOSED TO SEE. VERY JOHN CASSAVETES.

MISHU: THANKS! WILL, WHAT WAS A FAVORITE MOMENT DURING THIS PROJECT FOR YOU?

WILL: I HONESTLY HAVE NOT CONSIDERED MYSELF MUCH OF AN IMPROVISER. I TOOK TWO CLASSES AT IO MANY YEARS AGO AND I WAS PARALYZED WITH FEAR—I REMEMBER A TEACHER TRYING TO SIDE COACH ME TO RESPOND ORGANICALLY TO WHICH I REPLIED, “I WILL ONCE I FIGURE OUT WHERE THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE GOING!!”

MISHU: NOTHING QUITE LIKE IMPROV SIDE COACHING—

WILL: THIS SET, HOWEVER, MADE ME FEEL EXTREMELY COMFORTABLE FLEXING THAT MUSCLE. EVERYONE ON IT WAS INCREDIBLY SUPPORTIVE OF LETTING US PLAY. FROM MISHU TO OUR COSTUME DESIGNER TO THE SCRIPT SUPERVISOR, THE WHOLE ROOM HAD LOVELY ENERGY. SO I FELT SAFE ENOUGH TO JUST TRY THINGS OUT, AND I THINK SOME GREAT BITS AND MOMENTS CAME OUT OF IT!

MISHU: LAST QUESTION TO THE GROUP—IF THERE ARE ANY TAKERS—DO YOU THINK ART SHOULD HAVE A GREATER PURPOSE?

BEN MATHEW: SLIGHTLY IRONIC COMING FROM MORGAN’S ACTOR, BUT YES—

MISHU: MORGAN HOW COULD YOU!—

BEN: I DO BELIEVE ART SHOULD HAVE A GREATER PURPOSE. ART GUIDES OUR WAY OF THINKING AND WHAT WE CHOOSE TO TALK ABOUT AND ACT ON, WHETHER WE REALIZE IT OR NOT.

A CONVERSATION FINAL THOUGHTS

MISHU: CAN BE TOUGH WHEN THERE’S A LOT OF VARIETIES OF “CONTENT” OUT THERE--

BEN: IF WE CHOOSE TO CONSUME MEDIA THAT IS LARGELY VAPID OR VACANT IN SUBSTANCE OR CHOOSE TO ENCOURAGE IT AS OUR PRIMARY SOURCE OF ART, WE DO OURSELVES A DISSERVICE IN OUR DAY-TO-DAY LIVES AND OUR RELATIONSHIPS. THEREFORE, ART DOES HAVE A GREATER PURPOSE, AND ANYONE WILLING TO CALL THEMSELF AN ARTIST SHOULD BE WARY OF THAT.

MISHU: WARY OF JUST LETTING THEIR WORK BE OF ITS OWN ACCORD? VAPID? OR THAT IT SHOULD HAVE A PURPOSE BEYOND ITS OWN EXISTENCE?

BEN: I DO BELIEVE THAT ART INSPIRES AND SHOULD INSPIRE.

MISHU: LIKE GET UP, GET OUT AND DO SOMETHING?

BEN: I DON’T NECESSARILY MEAN TO MOTIVATE; I MEAN THAT ART SHOULD INSPIRE HOW WE THINK, FEEL, AND ACT. IT SHOULD INSPIRE US TO FIND LOVE AGAIN. IT SHOULD INSPIRE US TO QUESTION WHY WE DON’T GIVE AS MUCH AS WE RECEIVE. IT SHOULD INSPIRE US TO REMEMBER WHY WE STOPPED FIGHTING FOR SOMETHING WE WERE ONCE PASSIONATE ABOUT. IT SHOULD INSPIRE US TO BE VULNERABLE AND HONEST WITH OURSELVES.

MISHU: YEAH--

BEN: AND IT DOESN’T HAVE TO BE THAT COMPLICATED; IT SHOULD INSPIRE US TO LAUGH AND REMEMBER THAT WE NEED TO MAKE TIME TO HAVE FUN!

MISHU: WELL WITH THAT, I HAD A LOT OF FUN CHATTING AND WORKING ON THIS PROJECT WITH YOU ALL. THANKS FOR SHARING EVERYONE! AND HOPEFULLY WE CAN GET TOGETHER AND DO THIS AGAIN AT SOME FILM FESTIVALS.



ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

MISHU HILMY WRITING & REALIZATION

MISHU CURRENTLY WRITES, DIRECTS, AND PRODUCES FILMS OF VARIOUS LENGTHS IN CHICAGO; WHERE THE PAST WINTERS HAVE BEEN SO COLD THE ONLY IMAGINABLE REASON HE HAS STAYED MUST BE UNDEFEATABLE SELF-LOATHING.

PRIOR TO FILMMAKING, HE HAD SPENT THE PAST DECADE DESPERATELY SEEKING VALIDATION IN A PROFOUNDLY UNSUCCESSFUL CAREER IN THEATER AND COMEDY. HIS THEATER EXPERIENCE—WHICH CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS THE OPPOSITE OF LUCRATIVE—LEAD HIM TO WRITING AND PERFORMING IN AN ORIGINAL COMEDY SPECIAL 'TRAPPED IN THE NETFLIX', DEVISING THE "DILUTED SOCIAL SATIRE" PLAY 'GOOD MORNING GITMO', AND DIRECTING THE INTERACTIVE THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE 'OUT TO GET YOU'; WHICH THE CHICAGO READER CHRONICLED AS "THE SORT OF UNWIELDY MESS ONLY TRUE AMBITION COULD CREATE."

HE HAS TAKEN A STEP AWAY FROM THEATER TO FOCUS ON FILMMAKING. SINCE THE TRANSITION HE HAS WRITTEN AND SHOT OVER A DOZEN SHORT FILMS AND IS CURRENTLY DEVELOPING FEATURE FILMS.

C.J. ARELLANO

EDITING

NO MATTER THE MEDIUM, C.J. ARELLANO LOVES TELLING GENRE-DRIVEN STORIES THROUGH AN EMPATHETIC LENS. C.J. SERVED AS A VIDEO EDITOR FOR THE HISTORIC BIDEN FOR PRESIDENT CAMPAIGN IN THE FALL OF 2020. C.J. RECENTLY COMPLETED EDITING ART & PEP, A FEATURE DOCUMENTARY ABOUT THE OWNERS OF SIDETRACK, AN ICONIC CHICAGO GAY BAR AND WELLSPRING OF LGBTQ+ ACTIVISM FOR OVER FOUR DECADES.

AS A WRITER, C.J. WON GRAND PRIZES IN THE 43RD ASIAN-AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL'S SCREENPLAY COMPETITION, THE NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL SCREENPLAY AWARDS, AND THE CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL'S PITCH AT INDUSTRY DAYS COMPETITION. HE WAS NAMED ONE OF THE TOP 25 SCREENWRITERS TO WATCH BY THE INTERNATIONAL SCREENWRITERS' ASSOCIATION. VIEWERS CAN WATCH "GRIFFICA," A SHORT HE WROTE AND DIRECTED, ON SHORT CHANNEL OMELETO.

AS A DIRECTOR, C.J.'S WORK HAS BEEN HONORED AT MULTIPLE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVALS. HE WON BEST DIRECTOR AT THE ARTISTS' FORUM FESTIVAL OF THE MOVING IMAGE AND THE RISING STAR AWARD AT THE BRITISH HORROR FILM FESTIVAL. HIS WORK ALSO WON BEST SERIES/PILOT AT THE DEEP FOCUS FILM FESTIVAL AND THE AUDIENCE AWARD FOR BEST HORROR SHORT AT OUT ON FILM: ATLANTA'S LGBTQ+ FESTIVAL. C.J. HAS ALSO DIRECTED COMMERCIAL PROJECTS FOR BIG NAMES SUCH AS MCDONALD'S, CHEF BOYARDEE, MOTOROLA, HEAVEN'S DOOR WHISKEY, AND THE SECOND CITY.



THE CAST

BRADLEY HALVERSON (ALEX)

BRADLEY HALVERSON (THEY/THEM) IS A CHICAGO BASED ARTIST WITH A BACKGROUND IN THEATER AND PASSION FOR QUEER AND TRANS NARRATIVES. BRADLEY IS CURRENTLY PLAYING A GENDER SWAPPED VERSION OF PISANIO IN SHAKESPEARE'S CYMBELINE (MIDSOMMER FLIGHT) AND WAS RECENTLY SEEN AS LOUISE IN PRIVATE LIVES (RAVEN THEATRE), AND PLAYWRIGHT IN LA SERENATA (THE GIFT THEATRE).

THEY HAVE PERFORMED WITH OTHER CHICAGO AREA THEATERS SUCH AS LIFELINE, FIRST FOLIO, FIRST FLOOR, DRURY LANE OAKBROOK, REFUGE THEATRE PROJECT, BROWN PAPER BOX CO, AND MANY OTHERS. BRADLEY EARNED THEIR BFA IN MUSICAL THEATRE FROM CCPA AT ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY AND IS PROUDLY REPRESENTED BY SHIRLEY HAMILTON TALENT.





BEN MATHEW (MORGAN)

BEN MATHEW IS EXCITED TO BE MAKING HIS PROFESSIONAL SHORT FILM DEBUT AS MORGAN IN APOLITICAL! HE LAST PERFORMED AT FIRST FLOOR / THE DEN THEATRE AS THE UNDERSTUDY FOR IMRAN IN HATE-FUCK. PRIOR TO THAT, BEN WAS AT WRITERS THEATRE AS ANDREJ AND THE BANK MANAGER, AND HE WAS AT TIMELINE THEATRE AS THE UNDERSTUDY FOR UPTON SINCLAIR IN THE WORLD DEBUT OF CAMPAIGNS, INC.

BEN GRADUATED WITH A BFA IN ACTING FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN (GO ILLINI!). AT ILLINOIS THEATRE, HE APPEARED IN TITUS ANDRONICUS (LUCIUS), EURYDICE (THE NASTY INTERESTING MAN / HADES), AND ORIGIN STORY (DEX) AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, AS WELL AS VARIOUS ROLES IN WINTER'S TALE IN BLOOMINGTON, IL AT THE ILLINOIS SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL. HE COULD NOT HAVE BEEN HAPPIER TO CONTINUE HIS POST-GRADUATE CAREER WITH MISHU AND THE CAST AND CREW OF APOLITICAL!




WILL WILHELM (LENNI)

WILL WILHELM (THEY/THEM) IS A CHICAGO-BASED ACTOR, WRITER, AND EDUCATOR. THEY RECENTLY ENJOYED A CRITICALLY-ACCLAIMED WORLD PREMIERE OF THEIR SOLO SHOW AND PLAYWRITING DEBUT: GENDER PLAY, OR WHAT YOU WILL, CO-CREATED WITH ERIN MURRAY AND PRODUCED BY ABOUT FACE THEATRE. OTHER SELECT CHICAGO CREDITS INCLUDE MR. BURNS (THEATER WIT), STRAIGHT WHITE MEN (STEPPEWOLF THEATRE), NOTEBOOKS OF LEONARDO DA VINCI (GOODMAN THEATRE), A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM (OAK PARK FESTIVAL THEATRE), AND MY WONDERFUL BIRTHDAY SUIT (CHICAGO CHILDREN'S THEATRE).

REGIONAL CREDITS INCLUDE RENT (PORTLAND CENTER STAGE); NOTEBOOKS OF LEONARDO DA VINCI (SHAKESPEARE THEATRE COMPANY); AND OKLAHOMA!, AS YOU LIKE IT, AND MACBETH (OREGON SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL), WHERE THEY WERE THE FIRST OPENLY NON-BINARY COMPANY MEMBER IN THE FESTIVAL'S HISTORY. ALSO WITH ERIN MURRAY, THEY ARE THE CO-CREATOR AND HOST OF THE VIDEO PODCAST SERIES TEACAKES & TAROT, PRODUCED BY ISLAND SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL IN ASSOCIATION WITH HOWLROUND THEATRE COMMONS.

A PROUD NORTHWESTERN GRADUATE, WILL IS REPRESENTED BY GRAY TALENT GROUP. WWW.WILLWILHELM.COM IG: [@MX.WILLWILHELM](https://www.instagram.com/mx.willwilhelm)



**KATHERINE BELLANTONE
(CASEY)**

KATHERINE BELLANTONE IS A CHICAGO BASED ACTOR. UPCOMING PROJECTS INCLUDE PLAYING NANCY BROWN IN THE CLOWNS, A HORROR MINISERIES TO BE RELEASED THIS FALL, CAROL LEBRASCA IN THE FEATURE CANOE DIG IT!?, A MOCKUMENTARY ABOUT COMPETITIVE FREESTYLE CANOEING TO BE RELEASED IN 2024, AND THE HUNTER IN NATURE OF THE BEAST, A SURREALIST DYSTOPIAN SHORT CURRENTLY IN POST-PRODUCTION. SHE ALSO WRITES SHORT ABSURDIST HUMOR PIECES FOR PUBLICATIONS SUCH AS THE BELLADONNA, SLACKJAW, AND GREENER PASTURES.

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FOLEY MIXER.....BRYEN HENSLEY
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TECHNICAL SPECS

A SHORT FILM BY MISHU HILMY
14 MIN., 1.66:1, DIGITAL
NOT RATED

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