

JUNE 17, 2024

# THE *Hollywood* REPORTER

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# Emmys Special

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REALITY, VARIETY, HOSTING  
AND GAME SHOWS

JUNE 17, 2024



## 'THEY'RE ALL HARD TO GET MADE'

From left: Jonathan Nolan, Issa López, Francesca Sloane, Peter Morgan, Steven Zaillian and Jen Statsky chatted with *THR* TV features editor Mikey O'Connell about the challenges of bringing their projects across the finish line during a live TV Producers Roundtable event in Century City.

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## THE RACE

# Food as a Safe Space for Black Resistance Throughout Time

*High on the Hog* host Stephen Satterfield on how the Netflix series has solidified his thesis that ‘food is the mother tongue of humanity’

I’ve spent my whole career looking at food from the perspective of origin and, specifically, as an opportunity to deepen empathy among humans. For me, hosting *High on the Hog*, based on Jessica B. Harris’ text of the same name, has been a dream come true. As we started to discuss the second season, which delves into the Black diaspora as told through a culinary story, the stories of the Great Migration and the Civil Rights Movement happened to be stories that are

directly connected to my own family lineage.

When we introduced *High on the Hog* to audiences in season one, my style of engaging was not really about me as the host; it was more deferential. But as we continued our journey in the second season, we felt we owed it to the viewers to reveal more about their guide and his history. It was a profound revelation for me to think about the reality that my own family lineage is a true microcosm of the Black American story.

Sharing my grandfather’s story in our exploration of the Great Migration was one of the proudest moments of my life. During the Great Migration, which started in 1910, nearly 6 million African Americans left the plantations of the South and headed north for places like Chicago. During this period of movement and transition, many Black workers stepped up into the working class on trains heading north on luxury sleeper cars, which hired an almost entirely Black staff and created an elevated culinary

experience that catered to wealthy patrons. Those men would become known as the Pullman porters.

My grandfather Vernon Satterfield Sr., who died before I was born, was a Pullman porter. He was a brilliant man, yet he was denied his college education on the basis of his skin color despite being accepted on his merit. I knew little about his life, but hearing firsthand stories from Mr. Benjamin Gaines, a former Pullman porter close to my grandfather’s age, helped me imagine

what it must have been like. This experience was a gift.

So much of my grandfather's story is ultimately one of anonymity and a lot of potential that was never met with requisite opportunity. Having the chance to elevate his story in the context of my work in the space of food origins, food culture and personal identity was a deeply profound honor, and sharing it with my own family has been powerful and surreal.

I also had the great privilege of filming the episode "The Defiance" in my hometown of Atlanta. I grew up here, and it's the place where I first fell in love with food. We explored the deep connection of food to the Civil Rights Movement and how food played a role in mobilizing and funding its efforts, and the notion of the restaurant and Black restaurateurs creating a safe space for a movement to be possible.

I think so much of the Civil Rights story is conflated and flattened in a way that has been distilled down to Martin Luther King Jr. as a Disney-esque character of good and morality. And obviously that is not the case. There were so many activists who made sacrifices for our freedoms, and what's staggering is that many of these people are still alive today.

I visited three former student activists who planned and executed a Civil Rights operation in the 1960s in an effort to desegregate restaurants and allow Black Americans to dine with dignity. I was struck by their fearlessness and proud sense of purpose as they put their bodies on the line for a larger cause. One of these activists was Georgianne Thomas. As we sat at the historic Paschal's restaurant in Atlanta, she told a powerful and unnerving story



*High on the Hog* host Stephen Satterfield shares a bite with culinary historian Jessica B. Harris, who wrote the 2011 book of the same name, on which the Netflix series is based.

that has stuck with me. Thomas revealed a scar on her wrist from an encounter with a Klansman who put out his cigarette on her body during a protest. It was at that moment that she committed to the cause. She said, "When he burned me, it did something to me, but it didn't stop me."

That scene is so profound, not only because of the level of planning and coordination involved in these movement strategies, but because it reveals the great lengths they went to and their determination at such a young age. It was an incredible honor to have been able to sit with them, to hear their stories and to uplift their acts of resistance, which have paved the way for my generation and generations to follow.

Young folks have a way of making history, and it was an important reminder that the people who actively shaped the freedoms we have today, such as voting, are not distant historical figures. They are elders in our presence who are very much alive and filled with lessons for us to learn from. Atlanta has changed so much since I was a kid, but it will always be grounded in the history of Black food, and we have a unique opportunity to preserve this history.

Throughout *High on the Hog*, I discovered that there's actually no story that does not involve food. It's the central part of everyone's lives, whether or not we understand or acknowledge it as such. If you are an activist like King, and you've been arrested and you've been in jail where the food is not very good or frequent or healthy or desirable as a form of punishment, that's a food story. When you are let out of jail and you're starving, the first thing that you want to do to restore your humanity is have a dignified meal. I often say that food is the mother tongue of humanity. And it is really the only thing that we all have in common as human beings. It's the most quintessential part of our experience on earth and, I think, *High on the Hog* is the highest and best expression of this thesis around food origins, empathy and identity. — AS TOLD TO

ESTHER ZUCKERMAN

## QUOTES

# Yes, I Did Say That!

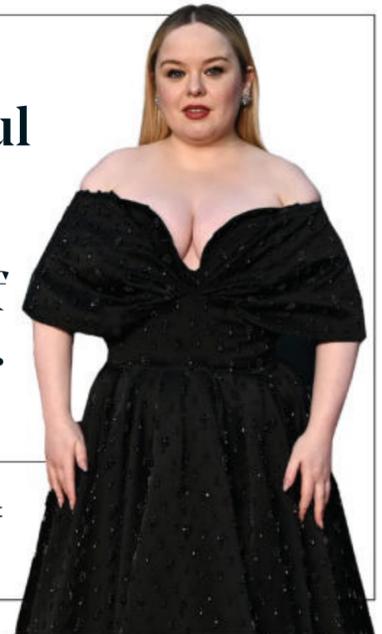
Who's saying what in the Emmys race

COMPILED BY NICOLE FELL

**I think what's really beautiful about this season is, the intimacy stuff feels very real.**

**Nicola Coughlan**

The *Bridgerton* star, to *People*, about her onscreen romance with co-star Luke Newton.



**I find so many marriages work when it's like the kindest men and the coldest women.**

**Ally Simpson**

The *Love Is Blind* executive producer, to *Vulture*, in a profile of the reality show's creator, Chris Coelen.



**Abbott Elementary feels like a play. That's what I love about it.**

**Tyler James Williams**

The actor, to *The A.V. Club*, about making the ABC sitcom.

**Something people say about women is that there's always a competitiveness. In my career, I've always tried to debunk that.**

**Renée Elise Goldsberry**

The *Girls5eva* star, during a *THR Frontrunners* conversation, about the show.

PERSON OF INTEREST

# Diarra From Detroit's Diarra Kilpatrick

The lead actress and originator of the BET+ series on making space for herself as a woman in the mystery genre: 'There are people who are not used to that, that really want you to apologize for being bold' BY HILTON DRESDEN

**D**iarra Kilpatrick is the consummate multihyphenate: creator, co-writer and star of the BET+ noir dramedy *Diarra From Detroit*, which mines real elements of her life to tell a classic mystery tale that also deals with grief. "I wanted to tell a story about a Black private investigator for a long time. I was talking to my friend's mom at a party, and she was saying that she had worked as a P.I. in Chicago, and I thought that was so weird, because this woman was such a mom, in the best way, who could get answers, even more so than a guy in a fedora."

This wasn't Kilpatrick's first time playing with the mystery genre: She rose to showbiz prominence after creating the 2017 ABC web series *American Koko*, a satire dipping into the

detective landscape that won her the Emmy for performance by an actress in a shortform series. But Kilpatrick's love of theatrics began far earlier than that, back in Detroit, where "I was the multihyphenate at 5, because I was operating the Fisher-Price thing to make music in my room, I was starring in the one-woman show," she says jokingly. She formed a theater company with her friends, and, desperate for an audience, they agreed to



## GAME SHOWS

### What Is Jeopardy!?

The quiz competition, now in its 40th season in syndication, has garnered the most Emmy wins in its category **BY BEATRICE VERHOEVEN**



Alex Trebek hosted *Jeopardy!* from 1984 until his death in 2020.

**D**id you know *Jeopardy!* has won the most Emmys of any game show? The show, which has been on the air since 1964, even holds a Guinness World Record for its total 44 wins in its 60-year history (as of last July, the show has received a total of 135 Emmy nominations). Among those prizes, *Jeopardy!* received its first Primetime Emmy last year.

“Every Emmy win is exciting,” producer Sarah Whitcomb Foss, who has been with *Jeopardy!* for 20-plus years, tells *The Hollywood Reporter*, adding that the Primetime Emmy win was “particularly special.”

“Each year the show is recognized, it feels like a wonderful affirmation that people still find it rewarding to learn new things and that this beautifully simple format that Merv Griffin created 60 years ago is still as relevant as it was back in 1964,” she adds.

*Jeopardy!* is, of course, the iconic quiz competition show that reverses the traditional question-and-answer format by giving general clues to contestants, who then phrase their answer in the form of a question. Fan favorite Alex Trebek hosted the show for 37 seasons until his death in 2020, and former contestant Ken Jennings, who won \$4.5 million on *Jeopardy!*, was named the show’s permanent host last December. The show is in its

40th season in syndication (not counting such primetime spinoffs as *Celebrity Jeopardy!* and *Jeopardy! Masters*), making it one of the longest-running game shows of all time, with more than 9,000 episodes aired. In 2011, Trebek was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, and in 2012, *Jeopardy!* won a Peabody Award.

“*Jeopardy!* has been a part of American culture for decades,” Whitcomb Foss adds. “Many of us grew up watching the show with our families, and that unique shared experience for millions of viewers allows the show to continue to connect with audiences of all ages. The show also, in my opinion, has maintained a level of excellence and quality that viewers (and Emmy voters) really respond to.”

This Emmy season could add another statuette to the Alex Trebek Stage on the Sony Pictures lot in Culver City, where the show is taped and all the trophies are kept. The awards “line several trophy cases and are a wonderful sight to see as you walk into our *Jeopardy!* Gallery,” shares Whitcomb Foss. “If you ever come to watch a taping of the show, the Emmys are one of the first things you will see!” **TJR**

take a gig performing at, among other venues, a youth jail. “My father worked for Wayne County, so we had an in. There are all these kids, incarcerated,” she recalls. “We’re trying to inspire them through song, and they’re just looking at us like, ‘Really?’ I always found a way to perform.”

She studied at NYU Tisch, but after graduating and acting in the theater and in small roles on TV, she “felt bigger than that, like I could do more.” So she wrote *American Koko*. “I remember going: ‘You have to write something, and it doesn’t have to be good’ — because I’m such a perfectionist and I will stop myself by trying to make something good,” she says. “I remember that the way I got through that was by watching things I thought were [bad]. I watched episode after episode of this show that I thought wasn’t good, and then I was like, ‘Well, you could at least do that. If it’s in your heart to make something, just do it.’”

*American Koko* led to a role on *Perry Mason*, expanding her presence in the mystery genre, and then to *Diarra From Detroit*. The show follows a schoolteacher who’s grieving the end of her marriage and is determined to find out if her Tinder date ghosted her, and why, which leads her into a larger mystery within the Detroit underworld. “She’s navigating a heart-break. She’s navigating grief. And that was something that I was going through, grieving the death of my mother,” Kilpatrick says. “Even though I didn’t write about it exactly, I was able to put those feelings of being very blue, a feeling like, ‘Oh, I’m not going to continue this journey with this person in the same way that I thought I would,’ into the story, and that emotional life was really our guiding light.”

The biggest hurdle in getting her series to the finish line, she says, was her gender. “As a woman taking up space, there are people who are not used to that, that really want you to apologize for shining, for being bold.” Still, her belief in the project propelled her to take it over the finish line: “I am one of those idealists who feels like art can change the world, and art can change how you view a culture, or a community, or a type of people. I know a lot of people [think] I’m just an actor. I’m not saving the world, and I’m not curing cancer. And the truth of the matter is, no one’s cured cancer. So while people are dealing with it, there are things like art and laughter that are just as good a medicine as anything else. I take it really seriously.” **TJR**



DomiNque Perry (left) as Aja and Diarra Kilpatrick (right) as Diarra Brickland on *Diarra From Detroit*.

SCRIPT TO SCENE

# Sex, Drugs and Party Shootouts

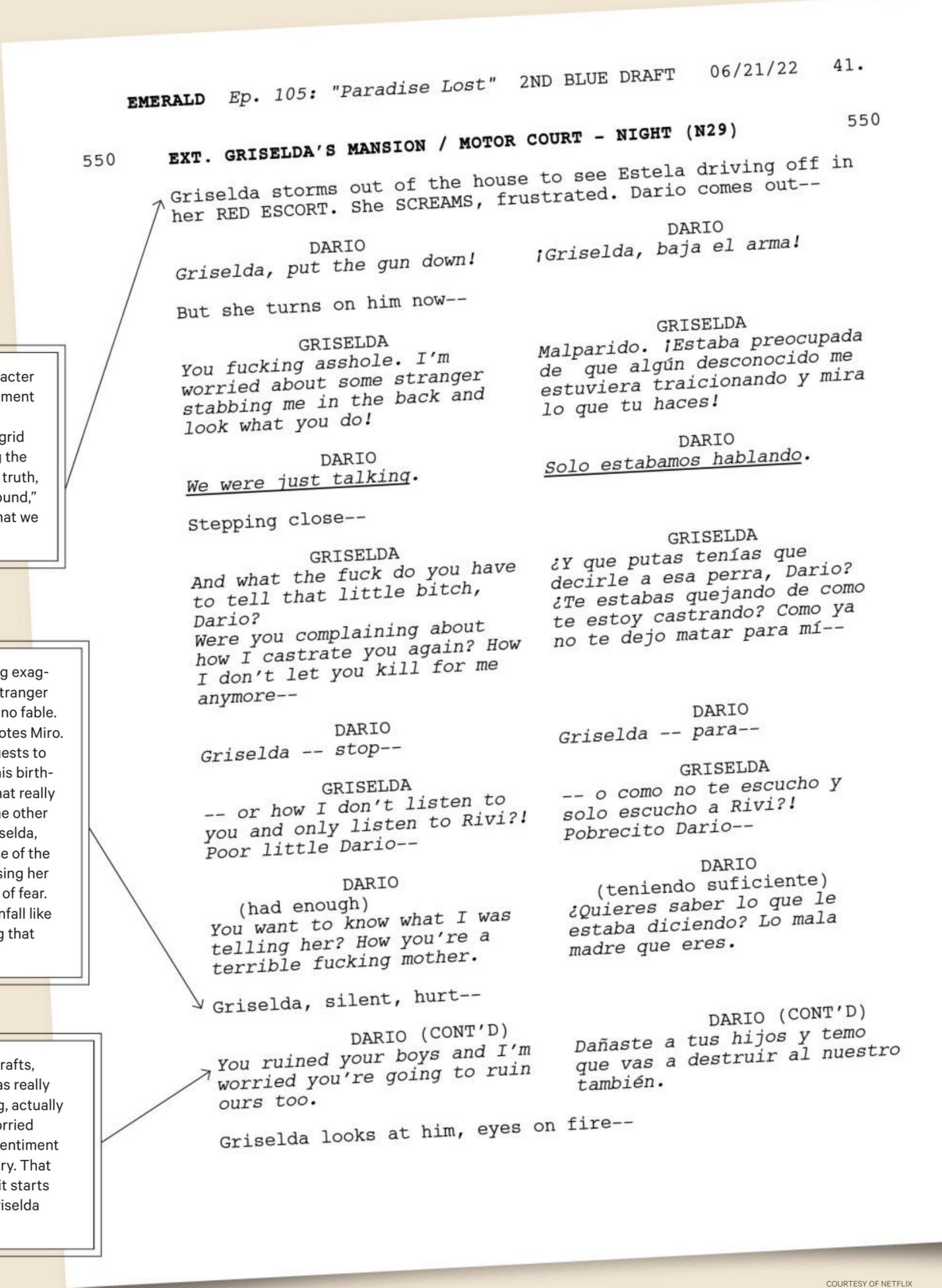
*Griselda* writer Doug Miro dissects the sequence in which Sofía Vergara's Colombian drug lord, Griselda Blanco, is filled with rage at a birthday bash during episode five of the Netflix limited series **BY HILTON DRESDEN**

In *Griselda*, Sofía Vergara leaves behind her comedic roots and steps into the violent, backstabbing world of her eponymous character, a real-life drug lord becoming increasingly deranged over the course of the six-part miniseries. Episode five sees her break her composure, pulling a gun on her estranged husband, Dario, shooting up his car and then forcing party guests to have sex in front of her at gunpoint.

Max Mermelstein, a real-life drug smuggler and character in the show, wrote a book that describes this last moment between Dario and Griselda Blanco, the final ripping apart of their marriage. "For writers Eric Newman, Ingrid Escajeda, Andy Baiz and I, when we were structuring the story, the way we do it is we have tentpoles from the truth, and those become what we build the larger story around," explains writer Doug Miro. "Mainly the dynamic is what we took, not the location, not what was happening."

Despite several details of the script being exaggerations of Blanco's story, the truth is stranger than fiction, and Blanco's gun antics are no fable. "She did pull a gun at a party like this," notes Miro. "She was famous for once forcing her guests to have sex at gunpoint. We changed it to his birthday. We decided to have one big party that really made for the claustrophobia, because the other piece that's here is that paranoia, for Griselda, is a big part of her story." Over the course of the show, she is followed by detectives, causing her to constantly look over her shoulder out of fear. "The reason we were able to do her downfall like this, in one episode, is we'd been seeding that paranoia throughout," Miro says.

While many episodes evolved a great deal through drafts, this scene remained mostly in its original form. "It was really built around a line that Dario, at least in the reporting, actually did say, which was: 'You ruined your boys, and I'm worried you're going to ruin ours, too.' Which was really the sentiment that drove him to leave Griselda in life, and in our story. That becomes an inversion of the typical gender roles — it starts in that typical way of, like, a jilted wife. But then in *Griselda* fashion, she turns it upside down really quickly."



COURTESY OF NETFLIX

GRISELDA  
I'm a terrible fucking  
mother... a terrible fucking  
wife...

GRISELDA  
Soy una madre terrible... una  
esposa terrible...

She steps back, raises the gun at him now...

DARIO  
Griselda -- come on--

DARIO  
Griselda -- vamos--

Putting her finger on the trigger, furious, but at the last  
second... turning and squeezing and--

Shooting the shit out of his BLUE CADDIE. A fucking storm of  
bullets, shooting his car to pieces -- bullets pocking  
quarter panels, shattering windows, flattening tires as she  
SCREAMS and--

CLICK, CLICK. Clip's empty. She stands there, breathing hard.

DARIO (CONT'D)  
What the fuck did you do?!

DARIO (CONT'D)  
¿!Que putas hiciste?!

GRISELDA  
You're lucky it wasn't you!

GRISELDA  
¡Tienes suerte que no fuiste  
tu!

As she heads back into...

550A EXT. GRISELDA'S MANSION PORTICO / POOL BALCONY - NIGHT (N29)550A

... Where she hears voices, looks up, realizing now--

A bunch of Guests are hovering here, looking at her --  
clearly saw the whole thing in the motor court -- including  
John, douchebag smirk, Rafa, Max...

She catches snippets of what they're saying... Must be that  
time of the month. That woman's fucking nuts. And LAUGHTER...

Griselda, a mess now, so embarrassed, so fucking angry. Sees  
the box the gun was in, digs inside and finds --

Another clip.

She swaps out the empty, and turns on the guests, everyone  
backing away terrified -- but she settles on one person in  
particular --

John. He raises his hands, that smirk disappearing--

JOHN  
Whoa, Griselda, hold on--

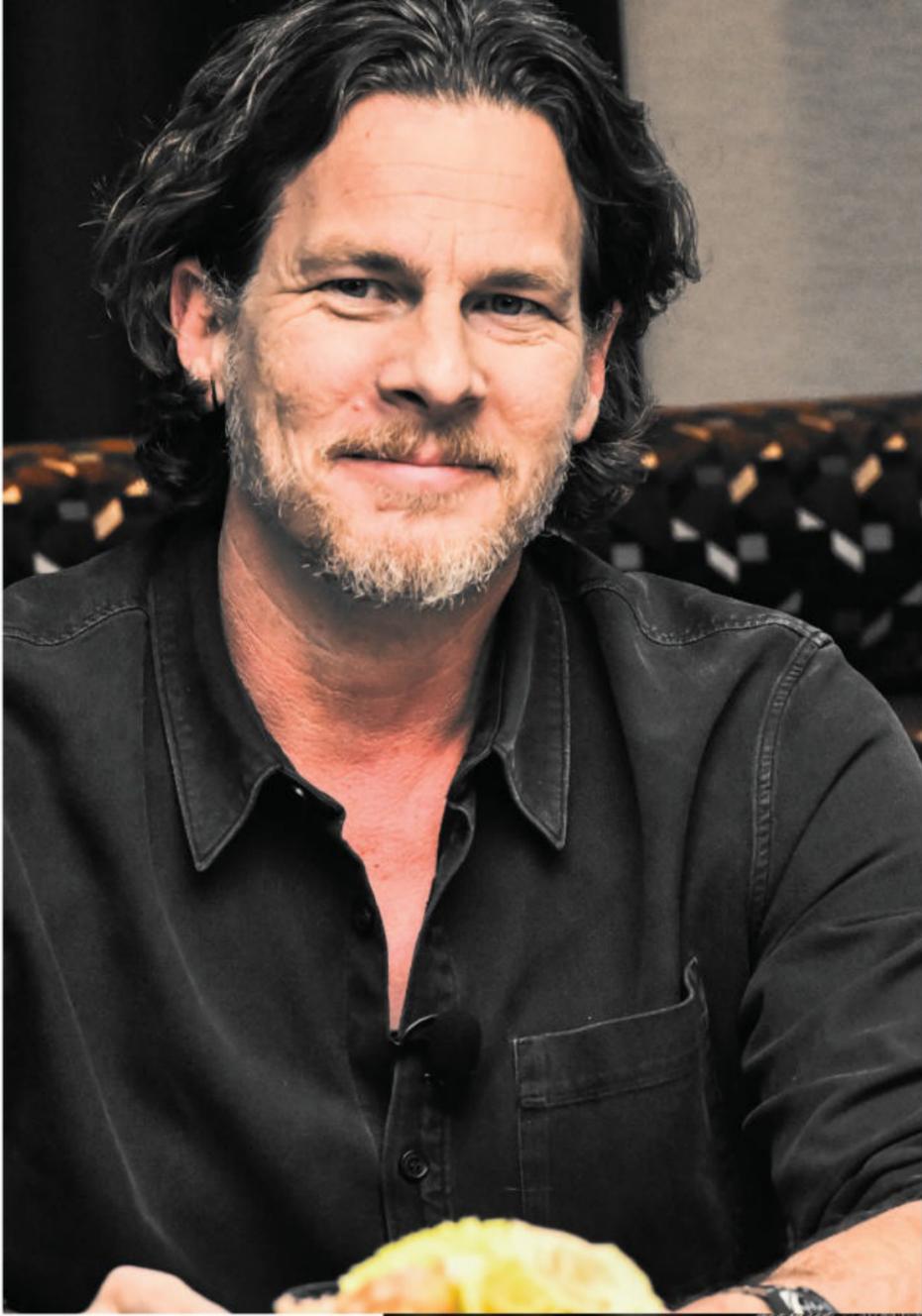
"The advantage is this is built from the prior scenes between the two of them, where she's already accused him of being a mole," says Miro. "We know she's been doing drugs. We know she's in a very unstable spot." Such intense dialogue required finesse from the directors and actors. "For Sofía to transition the way she did from doing comedy, where you never have a scene like this, where the shifts are so dramatic ... you have to go from being vulnerable to the jilted wife to then belittling this guy who's pretty much the coolest guy in the room. Sofía is so powerful in those moments, and that's what makes them so believable," explains Miro. "When she says, 'I'm a terrible fucking mother, a terrible fucking wife' ... Sofía is a mother. She has been a wife. You're suddenly empathizing with her."

In the final cut of the episode, Griselda actually doesn't point her gun at Dario. Instead, she immediately starts shooting his car. "Her line is more powerful when she just turns and shoots the car, and that's the zinger at the end," says Miro. Referring to the camera following her through the party post shootout, he adds, "That was essential, when we designed the show, it being as much in her visceral point of view as possible."

Miro describes the aftermath of Griselda's ammo-fueled meltdown as "the worst moment in high school, where you're totally exposed and embarrassed." She's lost her power and control after her public meltdown. Immediately following these pages, she forces guests to have sex in front of her. "When I read about Griselda doing this at parties, we spent a lot of time discussing why. And what we came to understand was it was to demonstrate her power."



Sofia Vergara as Griselda Blanco on episode five of *Griselda*.



Clockwise from top left: Jonathan Nolan, Issa López, Francesca Sloane, Jen Statsky, Steven Zaillian and Peter Morgan at *THR*'s live TV Producers Roundtable on May 16 at the Fairmont Century Plaza.

**THR**  
**ROUND**  
**TABLE: TV PRODUCERS**



# “The Moment I Hear the Word ‘Algorithm,’ My Heart Sinks”

Six of TV’s top producers – Jonathan Nolan, Issa López, Francesca Sloane, Peter Morgan, Steven Zaillian and Jen Statsky – go deep on the pains of pitching in 2024, the perks (and pitfalls) of IP and why there won’t be more of *The Crown* anytime soon: ‘I can honestly promise you I don’t give it a single thought’

BY MIKEY O’CONNELL





“I feel like I’m at the adult table at Thanksgiving when I’m supposed to still be at the kids’ table,” announces Francesca Sloane, moments into *THR*’s TV Producer Roundtable. “It’s surreal.”

The *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* showrunner may have the shortest résumé among her peers gathered at the Fairmont Century Plaza for the live event, but she is by no means out of place. That became crystal clear when the conversation turned to show envy. “I was envious watching *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*,” says *The Crown* creator Peter Morgan. “Dealing with repressed British people for so long, I was peering over the fence thinking, ‘Look how much fun they’re having!’”

That was not the end of the love fest. *Ripley* writer-director Steven Zaillian picked Issa López’s *True Detective: Night Country*, and vice versa. “In Mexico, there’s bad envy and good envy,” explains López. “Bad envy will destroy you. Good envy inspires you. It makes you want to do better. *Ripley*, for me, was a massive lesson in good envy.”

*Hacks* co-creator Jen Statsky, whose comedy represented the lone series on the panel not based on a known commodity, has that good envy of everyone else. “I have a show that isn’t based on IP or real life, and when I have even 40 people on the internet mad at me, I freak out,” says Statsky. “There’s tremendous pressure on you, the highest stakes. I hope you all have Xanax.” (*Fallout* directing executive producer Jonathan Nolan, for his part, chose *Bluey* on account of it being the only thing he likes watching with his kids.)

But it was hardly all fawning. When six of the top producers in TV sat down on May 16, they dug into dead pitches, their most intimidating scenes and the bleak tone of recent executive conversations.

I turned myself into a balloon animal taking this IP, which is the thing that studios are comfortable putting out right now, and making it into something that made sense for us as artists. I hope that we can get brave again as a society to welcome originality back.

**What’s the passion pitch that you’ve taken out and just can’t sell?**

**JONATHAN (JONAH) NOLAN** My brother [Christopher Nolan] couldn’t sell *Memento*. No one wanted to buy it. No one wanted to do anything with it for six months. And we spent those six months writing an action comedy. It’s still the one that got away. But maybe we’ll get back to it someday.

**Peter Morgan,  
*The Crown* (Netflix)**



**Jonathan Nolan,  
*Fallout* (Amazon)**



**Jen Statsky,  
*Hacks* (Max)**



**We’re in a period of serious belt-tightening in the industry right now. Who here thinks they’d have a hard time getting their show made if they took it to market today?**

**JEN STATSKY** It is a hard time to make comedy. There’s a real downsizing of the number of comedies that are on the air and also of the budget allotted to comedies. *Hacks* didn’t have a star attached — because we didn’t [have Jean Smart] when we took it out. The show is essentially about two women talking, and one of them is in her 70s. That was a hard sell at the time! We were really lucky to get passionate executives who heard it and got it, but I think it would be much harder now. Comedy is not being as prioritized, even as it was in 2019, when we pitched it.

**STEVEN ZAILLIAN** That’s been my experience all along. They’re all hard to get made. At the end of the day, you have to convince one person — one person at that studio who has the ability to say yes. And if you can convince that person, you’re in good shape. That happened with the first movie I ever made. It was *Searching for Bobby Fischer*. And Brandon Tartikoff, who was running the studio at that point, happened to like chess and kids. He said, “Yes, and I don’t even care if we don’t make our money back. I want to make this movie.”

**PETER MORGAN** It’s the same contradiction, isn’t it? You want to come up with an idea that is instantly connectable, one people can immediately see. But the things that we cheer and applaud

the most are the things that defy all that process. You’re stuck. The audience is screaming out, hoping that we bring originality to the table, yet sometimes the gateway to getting anything made at all is to be predictable. You have to fight that all the time because a lot of the things that I’ve written are terrible pitches. *Frost/Nixon* is the worst pitch known to man, but what can you do?

**FRANCESCA SLOANE** I got very lucky with the fact that I had the Donald Glover card. He’s known to be this guy who can get away with things with a twinkle in his eye. People sort of eat it up. But I am a cinema nerd who loves art films. I never imagined in a million years, as grateful as I am, that I would be writing *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*, the TV series. And the movie’s great! But

**ISSA LÓPEZ** I’ve talked to many filmmakers and storytellers, and, by my personal math, for every project that gets made — depending on who you are and where you are in life — between seven and 11 are not made. I don’t know if you guys are luckier than me or smarter in selling them, but so many of the projects that made me who I am as a storyteller, most weren’t made and probably never will be. Their corpses feed the tree of what I get to make.

**STATSKY** I’ve joked that I’m going to start posting on Instagram all my passes because we don’t talk about that and you don’t see it. All of us can probably speak to 10 projects that just never saw the light of day. When you are lucky enough to find success

and get something on the air, sometimes I do want to be like, “But there were so many ‘nos’ on this path!”

**LÓPEZ** I’m always trying to convince other people to come to my place, open a bottle of mezcal, and show each other the [old] pitches just for fun — all the cadavers we left behind, a Mexican Irish funeral for the departed.

**Jonah, you filmed portions of *Fallout* in, I believe, an abandoned diamond mine in Namibia. And because there are still diamonds there, is it true that everyone on the shoot had to agree to submit to a potential cavity search —**

**NOLAN** A body cavity search, that’s right.

**SLOANE** My God! *(Laughter.)*

the mine, you’re going to wind up in what they called “the shed.” You did not want to wind up in the shed. I’d call action, and I’d be focused on the take — but then I’d look over, and you’d see every crewmember who wasn’t in the shot looking at the rocks trying to figure it out.

**Did anyone end up in the shed?**

**NOLAN** No one ended up in the shed. I’m not sure if anyone wound up with some diamonds. *(Laughter.)*

**Peter, you got a bit of attention recently for your comments that you weren’t really that interested in the monarchy.**

**MORGAN** Did I say that? *(Laughter.)* It’s true!

Britain. That’s the family through which to explore who we are.

**That said, if you’re interested in predicaments, you now have these estranged brothers, a wild fascination with Princess Kate and Meghan Markle and, in general, a monarchy that seems very fragile in the wake of Queen Elizabeth II’s death. Do you give any thought, when you’re lying in bed at night, to resuming this down the line?**

**MORGAN** I can honestly promise you I don’t give it a single thought. *(Laughs.)* I can see that there are issues, but I can see that a lot of that is driven by the press, too. We ended it 20 years [in the past] and I wouldn’t want to go one step closer. You just want to let a family be.

things were getting interesting. Watching Dan [Weiss] and David [Benioff] take on *Game of Thrones* and really inject the production values of a big-ticket summer blockbuster into television, that was the thing that got me and [my wife and producing partner] Lisa [Joy] very excited to make *Westworld*. *Fallout*, for me, was trying to mount a robust defense of that level of production value. It’s not the most expensive show [Amazon has] made, but we shot it on film, we shot it on location, and we built all the creatures. We did it the right way, in my opinion. I am desperate to see that window of opportunity not disappear. [Retired Warner Bros. executive] Peter Roth, when I started my career in TV, would

**Francesca Sloane, *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* (Amazon)**



**Steven Zaillian, *Ripley* (Netflix)**



**Issa López, *True Detective: Night Country* (HBO)**



**Please tell us about that conversation with your partners.**

**NOLAN** I’m not sure I had that conversation? *(Laughs.)* We agreed on their behalf. We’d [originally] found pictures of this insane abandoned mine when we were researching *Westworld*, but it just didn’t work for the American West. But it looks exactly like Los Angeles, if you just strip everything away. They told us no one had ever shot there before. It was an active diamond mine for many, many years — and they were going to resume mining after we finished shooting. There were loose diamonds still just sitting on the rocks. We had carefully explained to the crew, like, “They have spotters on every hill — and if it looks like you’re trying to carry something out of

**So when does that feeling happen? Was that from the very beginning or was that after making a play and a film and six seasons of a television series about them?**

**MORGAN** I know, I know. It seems silly.

**STATSKY** What do you do if you are interested in something?

**MORGAN** If you’d have told me that I’d end up doing all this, I’d have probably dropped dead in advance. But it’s not an interest in the royal family. It’s an interest in human beings in a predicament. And I wanted to try and understand Britain. We have a ridiculous relationship with this family, which tortures them. It’s our fault. It’s not their fault. We torture them, and I wanted to get inside our problem with them, their problem with us, and our problem with who we are in

**I want to go back to what Steve said about the late Brandon Tartikoff, because it certainly seems like no one in the Hollywood of 2024 is saying, “I don’t even care if we don’t make our money back.” What’s the most difficult or depressing conversation you’ve all had with a TV or film executive in the past six months?**

**STATSKY** I said to one something like, “What are you guys looking for?” They said, “Hits.” *(Laughter.)* But they’re not wrong! I think that is what they’re looking for.

**NOLAN** Tying it back to what we were talking about before, I wouldn’t be challenged in getting *Fallout* greenlit today. But we might be challenged right now in getting *Fallout* made the way we made it. I started working in television 15 years ago, right when

gently remind me when I was trying to do more ambitious things on broadcast — he’d say, “Jonah, TV is two close-ups and a good script.” That’s right. It is. You never want to stray too far from that foundation. But I like the idea that TV can be everything that the movies can be, as well.

**MORGAN** I felt that weight of responsibility. With *The Crown*, I felt, “God, this is the first time in my life where I’ve walked into the room with the right idea at the right time.” I’ve walked into the wrong room so many times, clutching an idea that nobody wanted. For once, the stars align. I just thought, “I can’t screw this up.” We all thought, in that moment of people saying, “There’s a golden age of television,” you know that, as soon

as someone declares that, it's already ticking down to being over. [*The Crown*] was a decade of my life, but I thought that may never come again. That's why I went all in. I didn't do anything else. Nothing else, for a decade! Because I thought, "Tick, tick, tick. This'll be gone in a minute and you'll be pitching ideas to people saying, 'We want hits.'"

**SLOANE** The moment I hear the word "algorithm," my heart sinks. TV is not the same as cans of beans, a product that needs to be hawked in some way. So when it starts to feel like that's how it's being thrown to the world, you think, "But I just wanted to write!"

**LÓPEZ** I'm very satisfied with how weird my show is. There's a deep resistance to weirdness in the industry, and I got the leeway to be very weird. We've been very lucky recently, and it's terrifying

villains. In terms of the main characters, I just don't see why sympathy has to be developed for them. The story is what's important to me, and the way the characters serve the story. I am sure they're all some sort of version of me. I try to put myself into that story and just look at the behavior rather than trying to artificially create sympathy.

**MORGAN** There's a danger, isn't there? If you try and make somebody likable, as in life, they just become more repellent.

**Fran, you're tackling very dark comedy, and that can be a tough line to walk. How much were you trying to gauge how everything was going to land with the audience?**

**SLOANE** The entire time? The toughest part of this show was the tone and not knowing how it would be metabolized. I would

Maya's characters] in this couples therapy office with Sarah, having to lie — which is really counterintuitive to what you actually need to do in therapy. That found the comedy.

**Has anyone put anything out into the world — could be an episode, a scene, an anything — and have it not be received as intended?**

**LÓPEZ** As you write [a mystery], you sprinkle clues carefully so that no one is going to put it together — but, when the answer comes, they will look back and go, "Oh, it was right there!" You want that jammy experience of, "Ah, I almost had it!" What I was not expecting, and it's so silly of me, is the fact that people get obsessed. *True Detective* is a beloved franchise, and because HBO delivers episodes weekly, those people would watch an episode three and four times. So, [despite] my plan of being super smart and secretive about the very ingenious things that I thought people wouldn't see happen, they were catching on to every little clue I left. They didn't put the whole mystery together at the end, but some people got awfully close. For six weeks, I was biting my nails.

**NOLAN** We had a very similar experience on the first season of *Westworld*. The idea was to do a season-long mystery, so we structured it exactly the same way that we structured the reveals in *The Prestige* or *Memento*. I always thought that you have to play fair with the audience. You can't just pull the rug out. You have to see these little things in there. But, of course, with a weekly release, people on Reddit are devouring every little piece of it. We realized after the fact that, as fun as it was to see people savor every episode, we actually would've had more fun bingeing that show. Netflix's whole contention is that spoilers don't matter. They get people more excited. I don't quite subscribe to that. I think you have to be very careful.

**What's the professional call that you dream of getting — be it an offer to work on a property, or from a collaborator or an actor who wants to work with you?**

**LÓPEZ** I want that phone call to come from me to the studio. I want to be able to be the one saying, "Hey, I have an idea," and have someone listening on the other side. The traditional big, big packages? Not for me. I don't get excited.

**ZAILLIAN** I spent, I don't know, 25 years doing movies before I did any television; I don't really feel like I'm in the television business. I know that the true success of shows is when they repeat, when you can do multiple seasons of something. But I don't know how to do that.

**A lot of people wanted a second season of *The Night Of*.**

**LÓPEZ** Yeah!

**ZAILLIAN** But then you've got to do it! (*Laughter.*) It's tough. It's hard to do one.

**Between you all, you're telling stories of likable sociopaths and assassins, a nuclear holocaust and, worst of all, complicated women. What was the last scene that you wrote or filmed that made you nervous?**

**LÓPEZ** It was the day before the last day of shooting, and I had to throw Jodie Foster into a very dark tank of water. She's as blind as I am, by the way, so I had a lot of empathy that she couldn't use her contacts underwater. She's such a trooper. She trained and she was prepared. But when the time comes and you watch a person sink, not being able to get out on their own, something very primitive kicks in. Obviously, there's a diver there ready to bring her back, but I was looking at the monitor and I knew that she was panicking for real — which was great for the shot. (*Laughs.*) But there's this moment of, "Um, I'm killing a Hollywood legend and national treasure here!" So you say "cut," perhaps too soon. She comes out and I go, "Jodie, Jodie, is everything fine?"

**"With *The Crown*, I felt, 'God, this is the first time in my life when I've walked into the room with the right idea at the right time.' I've walked into the wrong room so many times, clutching an idea that nobody wanted."**

**PETER MORGAN**

to start hearing "hits" and "the algorithm" and "Who's going to watch the show? Who's your audience?" Those things just make me feel like [I want to] sit down and cry.

**Steve, you've said that you don't think about generating sympathy or empathy when you're writing your characters, but executives tend to be really into "likability." When have you been challenged on your style of writing?**

**ZAILLIAN** That's not the thing that I'm going for. Some of the great characters in literature are

write certain scripts, toward the end of the season, and it just felt very bleak. I was like, "It's funny, right? Right!?" No one was laughing. Donald and Maya [Erskine], especially, weren't laughing. And there are many beautiful films out there about heartbreak that can just make you feel like you're ripping your heart out over and over again. But that's not what the show needed to be. One episode was far too dark. Just a bummer. And I thought, "How can we fix this? Sarah Paulson!" It was an entire rewrite to put [Donald and





Six Top TV Producers and an Editor Walk Into a Hotel From left: Nolan, López, Sloane, Morgan, Zaillian, Statsky and *THR*'s Mikey O'Connell.

"Yeah." And I go, "You're panicking, right?" "Yeah." And then I go, "So sorry. We have to do it again."

**STATSKY** This seems significantly lower stakes, but, on *Hacks*, we're dealing with generational differences. Sometimes [Jean Smart's character] Deborah Vance does things that to a younger generation may seem unsavory. We did something in season three, where she hires little people to dress as elves and deliver her Christmas invitations. [Hannah Einbinder's Gen Z character] Ava, upon coming downstairs and seeing the auditions for this, is screaming at her. But it's always an interesting thing of us wanting to authentically depict how Deborah would think and do things, but also, on the other side of it, going like, "Wait, is this OK?"

**There's a lot of IP at this table. We know how it helps a project, but what are the negatives?**

**NOLAN** I was just having a conversation the other day with someone who actually tallied it up. In the history of TV, the vast majority of hits are original. It was one of the things that drew me to TV in the first place. I'd worked in the movie business for 10 years. I'd spent four years trying to write *Interstellar* for Steven Spielberg. He left Paramount, and the project fell apart. I said, "I know a guy. I want to get the movie made. But, in the meantime, I couldn't spend four years trying to develop [another movie]. At that time, the crisis in the film business was the same crisis we now face in TV. So, I took a

broadcast pilot [*Person of Interest*] out. It was an original concept, because it was very unusual to have IP in TV at that point. So, we're in a slightly bittersweet situation. I'm very, very proud to work on *Fallout*, but the lifeblood of TV is originality.

**What is the one question you never want to be asked again?**

**LÓPEZ** I think I'm done answering how I feel about [IP creator and original showrunner] Nic Pizzolatto reacting badly to my series.

**SLOANE** Fair enough!

**STATSKY** My dad always asks, "Which character do you write for?" I don't want to hear that question anymore because you have to write for all of them. You can't just write for one.

**MORGAN** "Did that really happen?" There's Dr. Wikipedia. Check it out! (Laughter.)

**ZAILLIAN** Same. The things that I did at the beginning were nonfiction, and that was a question that I'd get a lot. And my answer is, "Yes, in some fashion." Also, that a two-hour movie is not real life. But this is the only way that you can tell a story.

**MORGAN** I've had a lot of conversations about truth and accuracy and the distinctions between the two — how necessary one is, as opposed to the other, as long as something's truthful.

**NOLAN** A question I could retire forever: "Why don't you have an English accent?" Why doesn't Chris have an American accent? That's the real question! (Laughter.) **THR**

# 'We Are Natural. We Are Normal. We're Here'

*We're Here* drag queens Priyanka, Jaida Essence Hall, Sasha Velour and Latrice Royale on educating viewers and helping queer and trans communities with the show

BY HILTON DRESDEN

Since its inception, Max's *We're Here* has had a bold premise: Three real-life drag queens sashay out onto the streets across small-town America to coach ordinary people to perform in drag onstage, and hopefully foster some enlightenment and community along the way. For season four, the series underwent a complete overhaul, seeing the departure of the former trinity of *Drag Race* alumni — Bob the Drag Queen, Shangela and Eureka O'Hara — for the fresh new faces of Jaida Essence Hall, Sasha Velour, Priyanka and Latrice Royale. *The Hollywood Reporter* caught up with the queenly quartet about their respective journeys on the show and the importance of visibly existing as queer people in conservative towns.

## What was your relationship to the show entering filming?

**SASHA VELOUR** I immediately connected with the show, the drag performances that I would see clips of. That's what I'm obsessed with, drag numbers that hint at your personal story but turn it into this work of entertainment that can bring people close and hopefully change hearts and minds. I saw some performances on the show that looked like my style, with projections and certain kinds of reveals, so I felt

like it was beckoning to me. And then it was Bob the Drag Queen who called me up last year and was like, "Would you want to do *We're Here*? Because I already gave them your name."

**PRİYANKA** I love a good cry. I watch people win contests on YouTube just to feel some joy in my life — like, Oprah giving [someone] a car — and sobbing, so *We're Here* definitely gave me that feeling of, "We can all make it, we can all feel good," which is what I love about the show. In terms of the drag community, it just felt like a coveted spot. There are only three other queens who have done this job. It was exciting, such an honor.

**LATRICE ROYALE** I felt like this was just an extension of what I do. I'm always trying to motivate people to be their authentic selves and find the joy and love within themselves, and not to wait for others to validate them, and just be happy.

## What's your motivation to come on this show, which is such a different, more fish-out-of-water experience than something like *Drag Race*?

**PRİYANKA** I actually went in thinking that changing minds was the goal. I thought it was like, "I want [homophobes and transphobes] to understand that what they're doing is wrong. And that trans people are real people, and that

drag is beautiful." But learning from Jaida, Latrice and Sasha, how they handled conversations, I realized, "Oh, wait, just being here, in full drag, is enough to give me the strength to show people who we are." So, although I came in with a goal to be a little spicy, it didn't end up being that way. It ended up being more just having conversations with people, to educate them about us. There's a lot of anger, but what we have seen is that with our presence, they're not big changes, but there's been some really small changes in the community. The impact of just being there, it's amazing.

**JAIDA ESSENCE HALL** I've done *Drag Race* twice now. The refreshing thing that [made me] excited about doing *We're Here* was specifically that it was a setting that was not competitive with my sisters, and instead of feeling

like we're each on individual teams, where people could root for us, we're actually one unit, one team, playing for the same goal. We're here to support each other. I know that my sisters have my back. I felt like us being in drag in the world was almost like being investigative journalists in these cities, trying to figure out exactly what the story was and how we can help the communities.

**VELOUR** It's this funny thing, because the show sets it up often that we are really shocking presences in these towns. And I feel like our united mission, the four of us, was really getting people to see that we aren't shocking. That's very radical, in itself, to say: Actually, drag is totally normal. There are tons of us, this is nothing new, queer and trans people are already in your community and have existed forever.





1 From left: Sasha Velour, Latrice Royale and Priyanka. 2 From left: Royale, Priyanka and Velour. 3 & 4 From left: Jaida Essence Hall, Priyanka and Velour. Says Velour: "I feel like drag has given us all armor. We don't react with fear first."

"I know what I look like, I'm stunning. And people can't take that sometimes, and it's OK." Latrice Royale

That was always the mission; the message we were saying, is: "We are natural, we are normal. We're here."

**Did your relationships with one another change significantly as a result of doing this show together?**

**PRIYANKA** It was interesting, what I thought I knew of the three of them has completely flipped over and changed. When you watch a show like *Drag Race*, where we all came from, you pretty much only know the funny, "Look over there," Jaida's [line] or Sasha's big reveals — these very top-layered versions of these people. You get to know us in not a jester, getting-ready-in-the-work-room way. It's real. I'm excited for fans to see that because we were always encouraging everybody in the small towns of their community, so they feel safe. But

between each other, we found this community [too].

**VELOUR** We did a lot of collaboration in the most positive way possible. There was a smaller group putting together the drag this season. I think that empowered us to do it the way we know how, to really use some drag tricks, to get together at midnight and come up with choreography in the hotel conference room, helping each other's daughters [mentees] get into drag, and by necessity, those things actually don't happen on camera. It's really us figuring out how to do it, having meetings, having a smoke break together.

**What were some of the most anxiety-inducing parts of filming?**

**ROYALE** Honestly, the only anxiety and fear I had was going into the church [to speak with a prejudiced religious woman]. That

was my only time I felt some type of way. It was an emotional experience. But I felt like I grew through it. And as far as going into the trenches, there was no fear. There were no nerves. I wanted to hear them out. But also I wanted to be heard, and there was never a moment where I was fearful to confront anyone or be confronted. I knew what I was up against, and I know what I look like, I'm stunning. And people can't take that sometimes, and it's OK. You don't have to like it, but you definitely have to respect the fact that we are here and we're not going anywhere.

**HALL** My biggest anxiety was making sure for [my drag daughter] Malika that I got it right for her. She's like my sister, my family. I started to become protective of her, and I would just love to make sure that no matter what,

she felt amazing and that she felt like she'll find community and find out more about herself.

**PRIYANKA** The meet-and-greet we did, in the middle of a park, the open space. We put an ad in the [Tennessee] paper to show the community that we have to come together, knowing how public that was and seeing the Facebook comments that "three well-placed bullets would kill these pedophiles" before we stepped out there in all pink. You can't say everything is going to be OK because you actually don't know. I said, "Do you think someone has a gun up there?" But to Sasha's point, by the time the door swung open, it was like, "OK, shoulders back, ladies."

**VELOUR** I feel like drag has given us all armor. We don't react with fear first. But for me, it was really those moments after we'd stopped filming. I was traveling with one part of my drag family from New York, and we'd just be in the car, having heard someone literally talking about where a bullet entered her bedroom, or my other drag daughter in Oklahoma talking about basically being left for dead in the parking lot outside her apartment building. Just that brutal reminder that this country is not a safe place for queer and trans people. We could be killed in our homes. When we step out of the host role and become people again, in the car, on the drive home, you're like, "Wow, this is a lot," and it makes you reflect differently on this country and how far we still have to come.

**Is there anything you hope people take away from the show in particular?**

**PRIYANKA** That it's OK to ask the wrong questions. It's OK to feel misinformed sometimes, because I asked questions that I didn't know the answers to; I was scared to argue with people. It's OK to make a mistake. **TJR**



Left: John Early with Lemon Squares drummer Will Lawrence in *Now More Than Ever*. Below: Early stars in Theda Hammel's *Stress Positions*, released by Neon in April.

# 'I Am, Unfortunately, a Song-and-Dance Man'

As John Early preps an album version of his *Now More Than Ever* special, he talks the price of stand-up with a band and the gay-bashing *Law & Order* gig that got away **BY MIKEY O'CONNELL**

**J**ohn Early can't help himself. What was to be a low-commitment interview in the park is now crudit  and coffee at his Eastside Los Angeles home — and he's already apologizing for the lack of alternative milks. "The folly of my life is that it's all structured around getting the right marinated feta," says the 36-year-old actor and comic, who wonders aloud whether he's been typecast as the "panicked host." He adds, "Yet we are in my home, and there are snacks. I wish to not be like this."

If Early feels this serial inclination to play the host has seeped into his acting work — see his role in the recent feature *Stress*

*Positions* and five seasons playing vain Brooklynite Elliott Goss on the HBO dark comedy *Search Party* — it is something he avoids onstage. His first solo special, HBO's *John Early: Now More Than Ever*, marries sketch and music with Early's frenetic storytelling for something that comes across as both unhinged and precisely crafted. The project is such a point of pride that, one year after dropping it in amid the Hollywood strikes, he's reviving the material with an album (out Sept. 13) and 21-date tour. "I'm in this mode of, 'Go, go! You're almost 40. Last shot!'" he says, immediately correcting himself: "I don't really feel that way. I'm, obviously, not Timoth e Chalamet."

**You've said you're over playing the "bourgeois clown," this millennial Mrs. Dalloway always giving a toast. How were you in that lane to begin with?**

It's totally self-created, a prison of my own making and not really even true. It's more me trying to get out in front of the fact that I'm always doing that — and it's something I'm compelled to do. I am a bourgeois clown. And I put a lot of stuff out there that's just me as the panicked host.

**So are those the offers you get?**

I don't get a lot of offers. As I've been working, the industry has been slowly outsourcing labor to the individual — to the performers themselves. Everyone just

creates their own work. I'm lucky because that is what I'm naturally compelled to do. So while that shift works in my favor, it also means people just expect me to put myself out there. Maybe it's a good thing that I have that creative control, but I would certainly love people to want to work with me. When I do get offers, it's often for just really bad stuff.

**What's the bad stuff look like?**

People have a very limited imagination with gay people, so what I often see is these wishy-washy, almost like third-rate versions of *Weekend*, the Andrew Haigh film. They're just vague, gentle indies about ... nothing. They're like air.

**You did just star in an indie. Does it feel like that moves the dial?**

I had moments where I forced myself to acknowledge that it's cool and an actual milestone that a company was willing to put a very small amount of money into a movie in which I was the lead. I had to remind myself of that because it felt small. The release was small. So, there are no shock waves. There are tiny, tiny ripples.

**Tell me about the workshopping process on *Now More Than Ever*. It's part stand-up, part spoon concert doc, part actual concert.**

I've never done my stand-up in the traditional way of like, "All right, new year, new hour!" I do these little 10-minute sets for years at a time to get a good idea of what the best jokes are. Then I do a big show with music. My team invited executives to a version of this in 2019. But I was never like, "This is my show!" I feel quite allergic to this pressure of having that perfect show you take to Edinburgh, run in New York and then film as a special. So it was scary when HBO

actually ended up wanting to do it. I was like, “You know that I’m not doing any of that? I’m changing the whole thing.”

#### What was so scary about that?

That there’s no way they were going to keep their promise. When I signed, I was like, “Just to be very clear, I’m doing four songs.” That’s so expensive! And not just to clear the rights. You have to pay for a band, their travel, the rehearsal time. There are so many comedy specials because they’re cheap. And this wasn’t the cheapest. So, as the world was collapsing around us and streaming platforms were imploding, I was scared they were going to come back and say, “We just want an hour of stand-up. No music. No sketches.”

#### Britney Spears has been a throughline in your comedy. You sing “Overprotected” here. Do you calibrate how far you’re going to lean into her depending on where we are in the news cycle?

I definitely have to think about that. There were times when it was sillier to the point of even maybe insensitivity — but she was less of a dire figure when I was first doing her. For me, it always came from a place of deep love for her and her music. I was absolutely her target audience as a kid. Yes, of course, it is about the funny thing — the slapstick quality of doing the impression. But the reason I’m compelled to even do her at all is because I’m drawn to things that are a little

psychologically dark or haunted. And there’s something sad about Britney. But I do have moments where I feel, like, “Right now, I can’t do that.”

#### Who are the comedians whose sets make you jealous?

Pat Regan is so funny and so seamless between who he is in real life and who he is onstage. There’s a chatty, conversational, overflowing quality that brings people in. And he does not fall into any of those traps of, “And here’s where it gets serious,” or, “Here’s where I sing.” At the end of the day, I am, unfortunately, just a song-and-dance man. I’m not saying I’m a good song-and-dance man, but I am saying I am compelled to do that. So I’m envious of people who just talk.

#### You graduated from Tisch Drama at NYU, so the song-and-dance thing makes me wonder which studio you were in.

I did the Atlantic Theater Program, which was appealing. It’s a correction of a kind of extremely self-indulgent and masturbatory instinct in acting. I was so scared of acting school and being asked, “What makes you tick,” and someone trying to make you cry. They weren’t like, “You’re special.” They were like, “It’s a job. It’s *Law & Order*. You’re going to be on procedurals.”

#### So, did you ever do *Law & Order*?

I was cast in *Law and Order: Criminal Intent* as a gay basher. I was literally going to be like, “Run, faggot, run!” Then, the other character was going to fall in a river and drown. “Oh no!” But I didn’t understand the process — that you needed to know your schedule. So, after I got cast, I was like, “I’m in a play at school.” Everyone — the casting director, my agent — was like, “You’re insane.” My response was, “Parents, including my own, have bought tickets. And I don’t have an understudy!” **THR**



## ‘IT’S NOT LIKE I’M HANNIBAL LECTER’

Jane Lynch on how hosting *The Weakest Link* is kind of like being a party host: ‘It’s all in good fun’

Chatting with Jane Lynch about *The Weakest Link*, I set myself up for a dose of the biting humor that keeps audiences tuned in to the NBC game show week after week, when I ask an unfortunately cliché question. “Is there any celebrity guest you’re dying to have on the show?” I quiz. “Not dying to have — I don’t think I’d die for that, Brande,” Lynch says with a hearty laugh.

Sean Hayes is her answer, the actor and friend of Lynch’s responsible for her foray into game show hosting. From 2013-20, she presided over *Hollywood Game Night*, which Hayes created, at his request.

“*Hollywood Game Night* was a boot camp for game show hosting,” Lynch explains. “I learned how to be pretty good on my feet, pretty nimble, and keep a lot of facts in my head at the same time. Also, you have great writers and a great teleprompter person running your lines. You can depend on the people who are behind the scenes, which is key.”

In September 2020, Lynch began hosting the revival of the American adaptation of Britain’s *The Weakest Link* — the first U.S. version premiered in 2001 and lasted two seasons — in which contestants attempt to chain as many correct answers together as possible for a cash prize.

“Anne Robinson set a fantastic prototype for me to follow,” Lynch says of the woman who hosted the long-running BBC original and the first U.S. edition. “I just brought my own version of what she does, which, nobody can do what she does. She was such a master.”

Lynch says her approach to running the show, of which she is also an executive producer, is like being a party host, though one you have to stay on your toes around — to a degree.

“None of them are really afraid of me; it’s not like I’m Hannibal Lecter,” she says of the guests. “They know the drill. I’m probably going to say some insulting things, but I think it’s all in good fun. I’ve never seen anybody take it personally.”

Lynch would also never push the comedic boundaries too far, she notes. “I like making it a safe space for the players so all they have to worry about is playing the game well. I have such adoration for the contestants, too. I don’t know how they do it. I wouldn’t be able to come up with those answers while the clock is ticking and all of America is looking at you. I think it’s a pretty herculean task on their part, and they always step up so superbly.”

Lynch does the same. “What I love about hosting is that it’s about moving the game along,” she says. “I’m a controlling person. I like being in charge.” — BRANDE VICTORIAN







MY FAVORITE SHOT

## Soaring Above the Strip

The *Hacks* DP breaks down season three's aerial one-take opening scene **By Brande Victorian**

Season three of Max's *Hacks* begins with a suspended camera pan above the Las Vegas Strip that guides viewers inside Caesars Palace, where it follows a familiar figure through the casino for a gag of a reveal. Captured in one take, the shot, which the show's director of photography Adam Bricker calls "kind of badass," is a nod to the pilot episode of the comedy, which followed Jean Smart's Deborah Vance from her curtain call through the backstage and bowels of the casino and into her dressing room.

"Our showrunners really wanted to reintroduce the viewer to this world," Bricker says, noting the two-year gap since season two debuted in 2022.

Getting the pacing right for the scene, which was set to the Electric Light Orchestra track "Evil Woman," was a choreographic feat. "We flew an aerial drone down the strip, then as it was approaching the casino door, another drone operator, who was hiding behind a car, ducks out, runs and catches it in a fluid motion. Then he carries it through the casino floor and around the corner where we reveal the stage," explains Bricker.

The crew began doing dozens of takes around 1 a.m. to get the last shot of the season, coordinating hundreds of background performers and building the stage for what turned out to be a Deborah Vance slot machine reveal.

"We finally got a take that everyone loved around 5 a.m., essentially just beating sunrise," says Bricker. "It was really fun to be able to wrap up a year-plus of shooting to celebrate with this last epic shot." **THR**

COURTESY OF MAX



1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 **2004** 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014

## Queer Eye Hit Fab Status at the Emmys 20 Years Ago

*Queer Eye* has proven to clean up quite nicely, with the unscripted television franchise having collected 12 Emmy wins from 38 total nominations. It landed its first Emmy for its debut season after initially launching as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* on Bravo during the summer of 2003.

Focusing on five gay men known as the “Fab 5” who dole out makeovers and life advice to straight dudes in need of some guidance, it was a culture-defining hit right out of the gate. The series set Bravo ratings records in its inaugural run and turned the five charming stars — Carson Kressley (“Fashion Savant”), Ted Allen (“Food and Wine Connoisseur”), Kyan Douglas (“Grooming Guru”), Thom

Filicia (“Design Doctor”) and Jai Rodriguez (“Culture Vulture”) — into ubiquitous figures. “The concept is hot,” noted *THR*’s initial review, which deemed the show “splashy and spirited.”

Competing against it for outstanding reality program that year were fellow nominees *Colonial House*, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, *Penn & Teller: Bullshit!* and *Project Greenlight*. Ahead of the ceremony, series creator David Collins told *THR* that the nom “boosts everyone’s confidence, from the Fab 5 to the crew. It makes us even more motivated, if that’s possible, to make great shows.” As to what he credited for the success, Collins chalked it up to “honesty and spirit. People appreciate how real

we are, and how warm and generous people can be.”

The program ran for five seasons, then Netflix revived it in 2018 with a new cast. But the original version’s stars are still passing along their wisdom, with Kressley serving as a judge on *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and Allen having hosted Food Network’s *Chopped* since its 2009 launch. Meanwhile, Rodriguez pursued an acting career, with such recent credits as the 2022 rom-com *Bros* and a recurring part on *Akwafina Is Nora From Queens*.

In 2014, the TV Academy split the reality category into structured and unstructured; the current iteration of *Queer Eye* has won the former every year since 2018. — RYAN GAJEWSKI

### Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (Bravo) 10 p.m. Tuesday

The obvious question: Why would five gay men care about giving a makeover to a straight guy in the first place? It’s the ratings, stupid!



The concept is hot, the five gay men are hot (or think they are), and

there are oodles of schleppl-looking straight men out there who need help with how they look, live, cook and decorate their living quarters. So why not have a team of five impeccably coiffed, outfitted gay males do over a straight guy whose life needs help big time?

This splashy and spirited series is

From left: *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*’s Ted Allen, Jai Rodriguez, Carson Kressley, Thom Filicia and Kyan Douglas hold their statuettes for outstanding reality program at the 2004 Primetime Emmys.

The Hollywood Reporter, Vol. CDXXX, No. 18B (ISSN 0018-3660; USPS 247-580) is published weekly; 38 issues — two issues in April, September, October and December; three issues in March, May, June, July and November; four issues in January, February and August; plus 28 special issues during the year, subject to change — by The Hollywood Reporter, LLC, at 11175 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90025. Periodical postage paid at Los Angeles, CA, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send all UAA to CFS. (See DMM 5071.5.2); NON-POSTAL AND MILITARY FACILITIES: Send address corrections to The Hollywood Reporter, P.O. Box 37943, Boone IA 50037. Under Canadian Publication Mail Agreement No. 41450540, return undeliverable Canadian addresses to MSI, P.O. Box 2600, Mississauga, ON L4T 0A8. Direct all other correspondence to The Hollywood Reporter, 11175 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90025. Subscription inquiries: Call (212) 832-4672, or email subscriptions@hollywoodreporter.com. Copyright ©2024 The Hollywood Reporter, LLC. All rights reserved. THR.com PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

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