

SPADA Masterclass Series Podcast **SIS: A Case Study (Transcript)**

00;00;07;02 - 00;00;32;20

Ness Simons (SPADA)

Nau mai, haere mai, welcome to the podcast edition of the SPADA Masterclass series. In this episode, we discover how the smash hit comedy special 'SIS' came to be commissioned by Comedy Central on Prime. Our panellists are producer and director Hanelle Harris executive producer Karin Williams, commissioners from Prime Dana Youngman and Annie Murray, with Daniel Morrison from Viacom

Hosting the discussion is Pan-Asian screen collective co-founder and screenwriter Shuchi Kothari. A quick warning if you have younger ears listening, the occasional swear word will pop up during this discussion.

00;00;50;26 - 00;01;09;29

Shuchi Kothari

I'm Shuchi Kothari as Ness said and I'm so kicked. I'm really overjoyed to be hosting this panel, not just because I love the show. I also love the people who've made it and very rarely do you get to going to scan a panel and not feel, you know, whisper thoughts in the back of your brain, saying 'Oh my god, I wish that person wasn't on it.' So I'm so thrilled that, you know, I'm I'm with people that I very, very deeply respect, and I look forward to how this masterclass unfolds. I'm a screenwriter, I'm the co-founder of the pan-Asian screen collective and I teach at the University of Auckland, and this is my introduction.

00;01;31;06 - 00;01;49;20

Shuchi Kothari

And what I'm going to read out is a little poem not by me, but by Alisa Santikarn.

"My Etsy seller likes to call it a tassel bell-shaped Hindi-Muslim Indian-Bengali gypsy-style jhumka-jhumki dangler-wrangler authentic ethnic earring.

Fair enough, I guess, it does make the point across.

I miss home, I tell Ammi, so I'm going to buy myself some jhumkis.

Little ornaments to wear as your history.

You'd get them cheaper over here, she tells me.

Ammi, they're only two pounds.

Wow, that's a lot cheaper than you'd get them over here.

It's called capitalism, darling, my dad's voice is heard somewhere in the background. The marketing tool is rich culture; the product is cheap material.

Ammi and I roll our eyes into our front-facing cameras. He doesn't see us do it.

I giddily send her a link to the tassel bell-shaped Hindi-Muslim Indian-Bengali gypsy-style jhumka-jhumki dangler-wrangler authentic ethnic earrings.

I wait for expected opinions. She'll say, too big and heavy-looking. Not feminine enough for her liking.

She raises a grainy eye-brow at me all the way from Islamabad. And she says darling, Baita, she says, these aren't jhumke. It's kaante. It's not earrings. It's thorns. And it's these thorns.

These thorns that have been co-opted, hijacked, changed, mangled, thrown back at the

people who make this wear. This historically has made me watch SIS so happily, so differently that you don't know what it feels like when people who flip the burgers actually own them. And I'm so, so proud of you Hanelle and proud of this team and welcome everybody. If you're scared, turn turn the webinar off. It's not polite. Neither is SIS, neither are the people who have made it, but it makes it so exciting.

00;03;33;08 - 00;03;43;25

Shuchi Kothari

So let us all introduce ourselves one by one and then we get into the politics of the show. And, Hanelle, do you want to go first?

00;03;45;21 - 00;04;02;16

Hanelle Harris

Kia ora tatou, I just want to acknowledge that, you know, it's not common for a taina, for a young person to go first, but you know, time, time is of the essence and we've got lots to speak, speak of.

00;04;03;03 - 00;04;19;04

Hanelle Harris

I would like to start by just acknowledging, you know, my my uri, my turangawaewae:

Ko Otamaewa te maunga

Ko Mahuroa te awa

Ko Piki Te Aroha te marae

Ko Ngāti Toro te hapū

Ko Ngāpuhi te iwi

Ko Hanelle ahau

.

00;04;19;06 - 00;04;44;05

Hanelle Harris

I'd also like to start by acknowledging my collaborators who who aren't here, but who have been just as much of an integral part of this project and its success. And in particular, my producing partner Gaby Solomona, Destiny Momoisea and Maia Thompson,

My writing partners and Leki-Jackson-Bourke, my directing partner. So I'd just like to really acknowledge that, you know, as we say, it takes a village to make these things and this village, in particular, is one that I'm very proud to be a part of and to be representing today in our kōrero. Ngā mihi everyone and I'll pass it over to Annie.

00;05;12;01 - 00;05;30;03

Annie Murray

Kia ora Nelle, kia ora tatou, ko Annie Murray tōku ingoa, um, my name's Annie Murray and I am the head of local content, Sky and Prime, so that's Entertainment Content, excluding sport. I'll hand over to to you, Dana.

00;05;33;14 - 00;05;45;05

Dana Youngman

Talofa lava. My name's Dana Youngman, and I am the senior commissioner at Sky and Prime. And like Annie, entertainment programs and not sports. That's me.

00;05;47;07 - 00;06;01;04

Daniel Morrison

I'll go next then. My name's Dan Morrison. I am a senior programmer for Comedy Central across Australia and New Zealand, and we help commission SIS with Sky. I'll throw to Karin.

00;06;02;04 - 00;06;21;21

Karin Williams

Kia orana koutou katoatoa, ko Karin Williams tōku ingoa, I am Karin Williams. I had the privilege of being the executive producer of SIS, and how it all began was on a set about six years ago of a short film, a fresh short which Hanelle was on the crew of.

And sometime during the three day shoot, we had a conversation about where are all the young, brown female urban voices on our screens? They weren't anywhere, we couldn't see them. We hadn't seen anything representing the next generation of young Maori and Pasifika women in particular.

And six years later, here we are, because Hanelle and her crew went out and made it. So I'm incredibly proud of them and very grateful to all the commissioners who had the faith to back this project. And here we are today. So three cheers for all of you. Thank you.

00;07;01;22 - 00;07;13;06

Shuchi Kothari

Thank you. Thank you so much. I think before we get Hanelle to talk us through the journey, I think we should watch a little bit of something. So Daniel are you happy to play that clip?

00;07;13;12 - 00;07;16;07

Daniel Morrison

Yeah, I hope it doesn't lag too much, but we'll I'll put and see.

00;07;18;20 - 00;07;28;19

Plays SIS Clip: [WATCH HERE](#) (from 12:59)

00;08;40;11 - 00;08;56;17

Shuchi Kothari

Thank you so much. I'm sure most people in this audience have watched the show, but if you haven't, then this should be enough of a clue to why we've got them to gather here to talk about it, why the show's done so well and why it's got the accolades the acclaim and there was the warm reception.

00;08;57;15 - 00;09;20;27

Shuchi Kothari

So Hanelle, if you could kick this off with a kind of a, you know, a little snapshot of how it all came to be because obviously in the clip, it's so clear that you know your strong point of view of being creative in this industry and what it has meant in terms of your journey in terms

of who was telling whose stories and why and who was in the room, it was not in the room. All of this gets condensed in this clip. So if you can just, you know, talk to that a little bit and the kind of making of SIS.

00;09;35;26 - 00;10;01;13

Hanelle Harris

Yes. Annie Murray actually sent a really great article this morning that came out of Australia recently. [Six industry insiders on the TV problems with race in Australia](#). I hope you don't mind Annie, but there was a but there was a passage, a segment that I just really like to start with that really just jumped out at me and I think it really speaks to that through line and says that talks about the politics of the writers room. This particular passage says "people of color and indigenous people often come out of writer's rooms feeling quite used, especially when they don't stay on the team in a significant way when it's an all-White team calling the shots It can feel like they are harvesting minority stories and minority pain. Tell us your experiences, your trauma, especially. Yes, you might have been given a credit, but even that's a mixed blessing. The show could change significantly from when you were involved, and then suddenly you're being used as a shield to back up every creative decision, every problem, even the problematic ones". And I think that through line of SIS, really, you know, we did want to explore and challenge what we believe to be the structural, systemic racism that happens in the New Zealand film and TV industry.

00;11;04;09 - 00;11;24;06

Hanelle Harris

And you know that that's from a shared common experiences of being the writers that have been asked to be part of these projects. And as Karin said, we met back in 2014 on a short film and engaging with Karin as a new filmmaker. And Sima Urale. They were a big part of kind of as soon as I stepped into the industry uncovering the real rotting problem we had around story sovereignty. And so when we started talking about, you know, the inauthentic and misrepresentation of Māori and Polynesian women on screens in New Zealand, we knew that the only way that we were going to address that was to make it ourselves and web series at the time. Back in 2015, when I started with Baby Mamas Club was not, you know, web series was just kind of over there a little bit and there was money, you know, \$100,000 pods that were going.

And I was really inspired by what Roseanne Liang and the flat three productions girls were doing with with Friday Night Bites. And I thought, Well, if the end goal is to make a feature film a Polynesian chick flick, then this might be the first step to that.

So we applied. We got money to make Baby Mamas Club season one that was successful. We made season two and, during that process, you know, I'm really good friends with all of all of the girls in SIS the main three, and I just started writing roles for my friends that weren't being cast and in particular Gaby Solomona, who's who's one of the leads. But she's also she was also my producing partner, and it was about writing a substantial role that showed off her range. And SIS also was an opportunity for me to work really closely alongside Maya and Destiny, who who weren't getting the opportunities to jump on these mainstream writing tables and so SIS actually became our weekend project. We got together and we, you know, we we just we literally got together at McDonald's Green Lane in the meeting rooms and we got hot chocolates and we sat there for a day and we brainstormed.

00;13;36;13 - 00;14;00;14

Hanelle Harris

And initially we just thought it would be this online sketch series or skit type of kind of social media content. And when we what we did was while we were filming Baby Mamas Club Two, we used half of the shoot day to shoot a pilot or a couple of pilot episodes and was with one of the pilots we then went and just put it online because it was actually our crew were saying, Gosh, that was so funny, you should check it out. So we did. We checked it up and had a really positive reception and we said, Hey, maybe we should go see if some platformers want this and some platforms want this.

And so we went around and we were, we were to, you know, we were turned down by a couple who didn't think it was their cup of tea, which was particularly odd given the success of Baby Mamas Club and the fact that this was a spinoff of Baby Mamas Club.

00;14;34;13 - 00;14;52;27

Hanelle Harris

And so around the same time, this initiative, the Pacifica Asian Initiative, had come out and they were looking to fund a few projects. And through that initiative, we just thought, why don't we just go and pitch it to everybody?

And we pitched it to Annie Murray and Dana and the team over there at Sky and they they liked it and they said, Well, have you thought about Comedy Central or MTV? And we thought, Oh my gosh, television, you know, so we've gone from creating something that we thought would just be a weekend project actually designed to upskill young, emerging brown female writers, to now it was going to be potentially on television. And so, yeah, from there, I mean, it was really the relationship and the the warm reception that we received at that table on that pitching day, and we very quickly realised that this was a team we wanted to work with and a team that was going to support us and to our transition as we made it from digital to television. And yeah, here we are today.

00;15;51;22 - 00;16;08;28

Shuchi Kothari

Thank you. Not that this is your whole, I'm going to keep coming back to the creative process, but baby, this is a perfect segue way to actually talk about that moment of the pitch, right? You said you took it to Annie and Dana and and they said not only were they very receptive, they also suggested other ways to make this bigger. So. Can we hear from both Annie and Dana? And then I'm sure in the way that you talk about it, Daniel will come into the conversation. So either Annie or Dana want to kick this off, but I would like to hear from both of you, both Annie and Donna, because you must have had some internal conversations after they left the room. And those are the lovely fly on the wall conversations that we don't get to hear in terms of a creative coming in with something and what you feel about it. So Annie, do you want to kick it off? And then Donna follows you?

00;16;38;14 - 00;17;04;11

Annie Murray

Yeah, sure. For us, that pitching day was really interesting. It was a competitive environment for the platforms, as well as all for the groups that were pitching. And so we saw a number of

groups that day, but we were really struck by Hanelle and her team and just the the absolute authenticity and realism of the pitch. And and also we knew the experience of the team. You know, we knew that Hanelle had made Baby Mama's Club, the series successfully. And there was also sketch, as I mentioned, that had been shot and it was really good.

And for us, you know, we're in the business of taking risk, but we're also in the business of mitigating risk. And so when you see... we read a lot of props and some reads better than they turn out as, in the finished product. And others are the other way around. And and it's really hard with comedy, especially to read it and really visualise and Dan, I'm sure, can talk more to us. But once we we viewed that pilot sketch, which I think we will check out soon, so for us, that's proof of concept that this could work.

And so for us, it was pretty much a no brainer. You know, we just had to convince a few other people back at head office that it should be done. And we also had an existing relationship with Dan and Viacom through Tiki Town, which is a children's show we commission together and had a really good relationship and just kind of knew that Viacom would get up and Comedy Central would get us and would be a really good partner for it. So those things all added up for us really nicely. But Dana, you might remember more detail of that.

And I know you're good. You've got a better memory than me. Oh.

00;18;40;17 - 00;19;11;14

Dana Youngman

Well, I don't know about that, but I think for me, the professionalism of Hanelle and Gaby really struck us and the quality of the pitch, the quality of the idea. It was incredibly professional. So we got it so that the the thing that we're looking for, is, was also testing to see if someone can deliver on the promise of the idea. And it was very clear that they knew what they were talking about and they were experienced. And you know, we got really excited when we started thinking about Dan and Viacom and and Comedy Central and what it could mean for Hanelle and her team. And that really inspired us to do our best on behalf of our part of the project to to see it through.

00;19;42;07 - 00;19;53;14

Shuchi Kothari

This is a weird and personal question, and I forget that sometimes in these webinar situations, you forget there's a whole audience that you don't know. You just talk to these, you know, 5 / 6 people that you're having a conversation with. But I am curious to ask you this, this what's going to sound like a weird question? Did you see yourself in Hanelle in any way? And this is the Annie / Dana question. But I'm genuinely we always hear all white men in positions of power, constantly giving opportunities to young white men because they see themselves in those people in front of them. They see that's the younger version of me. They relate to them in that particular way. And you know, and we've always argued that we need to diversify, the god awful word. But you know exactly what I mean, people in power making decisions. So when all kinds of people stand in front of you, there is a different lens through which we look at people pitching at people, writing people negotiating with authority and power. So I'm wondering, did was this..?

00;20;50;05 - 00;20;52;25

Annie Murray

Well, that was well, it.

00;20;52;25 - 00;21;07;20

Dana Youngman

Well it was wonderful to see two women doing what I do. Well, you know, I was a producer and director for a very long time. And to sit across from people who looked like me was wonderful because it doesn't, you know, doesn't there aren't many of us. So firstly,, that was great. But secondly, I identified two professionals. That's when I saw two women who were clearly talented and knew what they were doing. And that's that's what I saw.

00;21;23;10 - 00;21;24;07

Shuchi Kothari

And Annie?

00;21;25;27 - 00;21;44;29

Annie Murray

For me, looking at Hanelle, I saw the young woman that frankly, I wish I had been at that age, so brave, so strong, so sure of her message and her politics. And so sure of how to express that. That's I was just blown away, actually. And, you know, it was probably an exercise in projection a little bit and that I just wanted to be able to enable and empower that passion and that vision. And you know, after all this time that we've had in the industry, Dana and I, you know, collective probably fifty years now, to be able to use the positions we've reached to enable these young ones to stand on our shoulders, I think is a real privilege. So it is about to be working out the politics, all but all of the funding, side effects and the strategy to work out how do we actually get this to happen?

How do we work with Viacom and New Zealand On Air? And how do we work out a windowing strategy that's going to acknowledge that, you know, New Zealand, on its priority, is a free access content while still giving Hanelle and her team that connection with a brand that has the mana, the global mana of Comedy Central, we we thought that was really, really important. But then it became about the detail. And you know, it was the idea and the talent were done and dusted. We knew it was going to work. It was then about how do we make it work? But I think it took a bit of strategy.

00;23;09;13 - 00;23;22;23

Shuchi Kothari

And Daniel, for you, you know, of course, Viacom has a relationship with New Zealand local content, but for this particular project, SIS when Annie and Dana got in touch with you and said, Hey, there's something we'd like you to see.

Can you take it from there? What happened?

00;23;26;01 - 00;23;38;19

Daniel Morrison

Yeah. So from our side, it was Annie and Dana coming to us with this project, and we had, I guess, the pilot episode of SIS< that was just a sketch basically that could have lived in the show or not.

And that was really what gave us a taste for what this could be. We didn't have like a, you know, document which told us what this series could be, but this was the kind of the flavour of it, a kind of fleshed out what this could be, which I think always definitely helps for anyone who is going into a pitch or something having something that is a flavour of what your show is. Something visual, you can see, definitely helps those conversations when people are looking at a new project like this. I think also for us as well just seeing Baby Mama's Club as well existing and saying what a great product that was and that this could kind of live in the same world and have that same production quality and everything. But it's just on a different platform. I think that gave us all the confidence when looking at this to go. 'Yes, these are some talented people who have produced a really great product already. We're getting a flavour of what this new product is in a way like all aboard.' So that kind of made it a lot easier to have conversations on the outside having kind of a background there to kind of use to have those conversations as you speak to people higher up to get all this approved.

00;24;38;01 - 00;24;47;25

Shuchi Kothari

By Daniel, do you mind showing us the the sketch that you you know that you saw that kind of made you go, Yeah, get the tone. You know what this is about?

00;24;48;29 - 00;24;54;20

Daniel Morrison

Certainly

00;24;55;00 - 00;25;12;25

SIS Sketch - [WATCH HERE](#)

00;27;01;12 - 00;27;17;08

Shuchi Kothari

(Laughs) So Daniel can you tell us a little bit about how when you see something like this, right, you see this and how do you know? Yeah, this is Comedy Central, because somebody could see this and say, Oh my God, this is so New Zealand. This is so Pasifika, this is so local. So, you know, the specificity of it, which actually I know is what makes it universal. But how do you go? Yeah, we can see this. We can see this as having an audience on Comedy Central.

00;27;30;13 - 00;27;45;20

Daniel Morrison

I think for us, it's like a thing that we really focus on across MTV and Comedy Central is knowing our brand and knowing our audience. And it was kind of looking at this and thinking that definitely spoke to the audience that we have in New Zealand and also kind of had that global appeal as well or just kind of that like the family and it's like friendship of it all. That's kind of something that just transcends what, like transcends in comedy in that sense and goes past just having that local voice as well. And also with us as well, when we had that sketch, it wasn't just like me receiving an email like after I watched it, we then had a big group of us sitting in like our normal Comedy Central meeting. It's a bigger team. Put that on and getting everyone else's response for it. So it was like a resounding kind of like positive response to that, which then, you know, started going up for approvals after that.

But it was definitely the whole team actually watched that and felt that it very much sat in line with other programming that we've either got from the US or the UK or other stuff we've acquired as well. It can kind of sit beside some of those other series that we've had.

00;28;27;28 - 00;28;38;14

Daniel Morrison

And so when we kind of get that, I guess that flavour that we're looking for, that kind of makes the decision so much easier to go. Yes, it's going to definitely fit in there it's not a risk in that sense, either.

00;28;39;03 - 00;28;56;19

Shuchi Kothari

Right. Thank you, Karin, this one's for you. Would you tell us a little bit about how you and you know, you did mention when you were introducing yourself how you and Hanelle had met and how you kind of you knew her as a person, her aesthetic, her politics, you know her humanity. But can you tell us a little bit about this particular show in the kind of around this time when it was being pitched? Were you involved at that stage or did you come on board later? Can you talk a little bit about this relationship in the early days of its development?

00;29;15;10 - 00;29;37;12

Karin Williams

Well, actually, I... Hanelle showed me, Hanelle and Gaby showed me this clip. And at that point, I just left the New Zealand Film Commission and I was sort of had producing aversion as a result of of of working, you know, on the other side and was basically saying no to everybody and to everything. 'No, I'm not doing that. I'm too burned out' or whatever. And they showed me that clip and the minute I saw it, I just said, yes, I just, yes, just came out of my mouth. I don't have it really even time to think about it because to me, it just seemed it was so fresh. It was so real. I knew that all the performers there, like my kids and I just thought, Yeah, it's time and as, Hanelle mentioned at the time we thought this was going to be little web bites, so it was pitched as snack sized web pieces. So it seemed like a lot of fun. It seemed like it was doable. And, you know, and then it was sort of a no pressure gig. It evolved into something much, much bigger during its production, during the production phase really and development phase.

I think in many ways it was a convergence of of different forces and in particular having women of colour sitting in the decision making chair with years and years of experience who were able to see the merit and Dan of course across the Tasman. Interesting how sometimes it takes people offshore to be able to see the merit and our programming. I do think there is perhaps some inherent structural racism around the attitude towards our local content. And so for me, it was it was exciting and it was a no brainer. So yeah, that was sort of the inception of getting involved with with the project never expecting it to. I mean, I think at some point we did realise that we probably had a hit on our hands, but in the beginning it was just a cute little series of web pieces.

00;31;35;05 - 00;31;46;02

Shuchi Kothari

And I think it's in a way good not to know how phenomenal it's going to be right at the start, right? There's some advantage in not thinking this is going to completely be as great as it

ended up being. So Hanelle, in talking about it, you had brought us to the time of the pitch. And now can you talk us a little bit about the creative process and the politics of of the creating the writers room that you create because there's a kind of a meta thing going on here, there is a writers room in the show, but there's obviously the writers room that you dealt with as a showrunner, as you know, the creative person behind the show. And how was that writer's room and what was your experience?

How did you go about it? What did you do to encourage new people to preserve their mana, but also to want it to be professional because there is that, you know, as Dana said, ultimately, you can look at someone who looks like you, but it's the professionalism that you want that you expect that they can deliver. So how did you handle all these sometimes competing forces in creating a creative team?

00;32;41;21 - 00;33;09;25

Hanelle Harris

I think I think one thing I'd really like to acknowledge is, you know, in reflection, when I look back at the fact that we were intending for it to be snack sized sketches that sat online. I often think to myself after doing two series of two webseries two seasons of it, why did I not have the vision, the courage, the belief in myself to say, Hey, why don't we pitch this to television? Have we not? Have we not achieved enough in this short form? And it's not to takahe, or like it's not to downgrade web series, you know, I owe my career to making web series. But as we often know, the budgets attached to web series squash production values and it can it can really limit the potential of the creatives and involved the potential of the storytelling, the potential of the global reach, just based on the fact that you don't have the production resources to support. So I just wanted to to acknowledge that that was kind of front and centre as Karin was speaking. But to your question of the what it was like to put that team together. Unequivocally, I knew off the bat like this was going to be a brown writer's table and we were going to have different voices around the table. We were going to have Samoan voices around the table, Tongan, Niuean, we're going to have someone from an older generation. We heard from Shimpal Lelisi, you know, naked Samoans, you know, with the generation above us that pioneered so much space for us and we wanted to learn from our tuakana in that way. We did reserve a very special spot on our table for Tom Sainsbury because, you know, he's someone in terms of craft that we admire. And you know, that's a reality for us is that, yes, we can have this vision that we want to be brown from top to bottom, but that variance of experience is not there yet. In our industry, it doesn't exist. So for me, I knew we needed an experienced comedy person on that table that often works in television, on these, on these types of projects, and, you know, so so that for me was a very special kind of specialised skillset that we needed in order for us to be inspired to rise or to to to, you know, to grow. Iron sharpens iron, so every single person at that table was very carefully thought of in terms of what perspective they brought.

00;35;46;09 - 00;36;12;08

Hanelle Harris

And I think that's always an amazing place to start from as to make sure that your table is diverse. And we're not talking about race, we're talking intersection intersectionality. We're talking about sexuality, age, gender, everything. Parents, people that haven't had kids, you know, people that that experience disability as part of their lived human experiences. I think these are all the things a good showrunner needs to consider when they're putting together a

table. We did, you know, bring bring over a an experienced showrunner from Australia who had experience and has a lot of experience show running and particularly in sketch comedy. And, and you know, there's there is there is a culture, a cultural difference there and the way in which the workers approached not only between Pakeha and and Maori or indigenous or Pasifika, but in Australian and New Zealand, the comedy was very different. The taste was very different. So, you know, I mean, that was, um, development always had. And I think you have to be prepared to throw things away and throw everything away at times. And you know, we did believe that first writers' table feeling like we weren't really connected to the work in the way in which we felt. We we we weren't connected to the work in the way in which we were aspiring. You know, we were really aspiring to say certain things and you know, the comedy that we had created on that initial story table for me was traditional sketch. And the thing with this, I believe, is that it's a it's a very complex type of comedy. It's a social, it's political and it's very pointed and what it's trying to say. So it's not slapstick, it's much more sophisticated, in my opinion.

00;38;03;20 - 00;38;21;24

Hanelle Harris

So we had to go back to the drawing board and because we'd flown back our show runner at that point, I really had to step up. And, you know, and we had to pull together whatever resources we could and and start that process all over again. And it was interesting for me to see, you know, what came of that next lot, that next phase of storylining. And you know, I'd come up with the idea originally, like we knew structurally, we needed a through line that says works and two layers. You have the sketch little short size, short comedy, bite sized pieces, which are about these three cousins, these fictional cousins, these best friends. But we needed a through line that connected it all together. And you know, again, going back to that whole kōrero around story sovereignty, it's something that I find myself and all of my brown industry friends talking about on a weekly basis. We're looking at all of these funding announcements that are being made, and we're looking at the projects that are being funded at that top tier five to seven million dollar tier. And we're looking at it and we're going, why are these white Pakeha producers getting millions of dollars to make our stories? And then we're talking about who of our friends are actually working on those projects? We're talking about the cultural safety or the lack of cultural safety, you know, and right through until when these projects actually land on our television screens and the inauthentic, you know, misrepresentation, the stereotypes of our people that are continuously perpetuated as a result of of these Pakeha producers making and telling our stories. And you know, Tom, already, you know, you know, his particular comedy is around really speaking to that middle class Pakeha audience and highlighting problematic things, whether they're aware or not.

00;40;23;28 - 00;40;45;05

Hanelle Harris

I would like to think that Tom is kind of nudging them. And, well, we just thought he's the perfect talent and we all got together. And I said, you know, this through line. Let's look at the politics of a writer's room because it can be just as juicy and dramatic sometimes as we all know, as writers and and together myself and that ensemble of comedians and actors, you know, we came up with the initial storyline, the initial initial throughline of that writers room. So yeah, that's, yeah

00;41;02;17 - 00;41;17;11

Shuchi Kothari

So just quickly to understand so the person would come through as a show runner from Australia. Did you cease to work with them by the time that you kind of said, this is not going to work, we need to do it ourselves? Is that is that the correct representation?

00;41;21;26 - 00;41;22;19

Hanelle Harris

Well. Yes, but mainly, I mean, budget helped that decision a lot. You know, it's quite expensive getting someone that experience, then you know, this still, to some degree, was not a mainstream budget. But the other thing, as well as once I had stepped into that position as a story producer and we had to do that second lot of story lining, I just realised yet again, why did I have this internalised idea of myself that I wasn't good enough to run my own table? You know, I literally had, you know, gone through that whole process of getting the funding and pitching. And this and that was I not the right person? Like, what was it about me that I had, I wasn't even a thought to myself, you know, that I would be the best person for that job. And again, it talks to the way in which we, as brown people, you know, we internalise the reflexive perception of not being smart enough, not being good enough, not being experienced enough. You know, and I mean, I think at that point, it was just like. 'The job has to get done', and there was no better person for the job, and even though we went all the way around to arrive to that, I still wouldn't change it because now I've finally, you know, six years into my career realised I don't need to hire another story, producer or showrunner to make my television series. I can do it myself. You know?

00;43;11;03 - 00;43;28;11

Shuchi Kothari

And in this process, I'm not sure it's a question I'm interested in. Commissioner, sometimes I've quite involved in development. They keep an eye on developments. Sometimes it's more hands-off. How was it like with the two of you, Dana and Annie? Were you aware of what was going on? Or were you like 'nah we completely trust her'? And I'm not saying that your awareness would have meant that you didn't trust her. I'm just curious about the process. How involved were you through this development phase?

00;43;43;20 - 00;44;01;02

Annie Murray

We were fairly hands off, to be honest. We we we trusted Hanelle. You know, we set up the foundations with her to to, you know, ensure she would succeed. And we knew it wouldn't be easy production never is. There's always ups and downs. And and you know, as a commissioner, you do develop a fairly good sixth sense reading between the lines of emails and producers reports, and you do hear talk too, you know, so we're not as isolated in our Mount Wellington Tower as people think we are. You know. We've got a fair idea of what's going on, but we trusted Hanelle would find her way through. And of course she does.

00;44;28;22 - 00;44;46;27

Shuchi Kothari

Yeah. The reason I ask is, I think the point her now makes is it's such a valid one about what is it that makes someone go. I made a really successful, you know, web series, but I still need to kind of think small or think that I need somebody else to kind of validate what I'm doing or somebody, you know, a slightly bigger name. I don't, you know, all these things that

make you kind of as you talk about internalising your place. And I was saying this to Amy Mills at New Zealand On Air not so long ago that it's this thing about, you know, you want a seat at the table and they put you on a child's table. They put you on the kids table and then nobody's telling you that you've actually outgrown the kids table. Please come to that table. Nobody, actually, there's now, you know, so you're just at the kids table, you've outgrown the kids table. There are very young kids who are looking at you going, Oh my God, you're taking away my high chair and you sit there and say, I don't want to be in this high chair. Actually, I want to be sitting somewhere else. And yet we find Hanelle that we seek that permission to be part of the adult table as against just kicking off a chair and telling someone you'll be warming that chair for so long. Move your ass. I need to sit here and it's something that's systemic. This is not about individuals and personalities. It is systemic. And until we actually deal with it at the systemic level, I think we are only going to be relying on the goodness of good people.

00;46;05;08 - 00;46;18;07

Shuchi Kothari

And I think we need to be thinking about change beyond the goodness of good people. You know what I mean? Like, I just think it's amazing it worked out for you Hanelle, I'm I'm so happy that you kind of just took stock and you have the support and you said, No, I can do this myself. You know, why am I going? But but what if? What if you were not surrounded by supportive people? Why should you be part of a system that put you there in the first place? Is the question that I want to pose to this panel for a little bit as a kind of a detour and then will again come back to the creative process with SIS. And anyone, you know, I'm happy for you to just put your hand up. I'm not asking yet. Please Annie, thank you.

00;46;42;09 - 00;47;07;17

Annie Murray

Yeah. So the thing with Dana and I had a good talk about this this morning and the thing of getting from the child's table to the adults table is. I see a real responsibility on commissioners and funders actually to step up there and to identify talent and work hard to do that. Don't be lazy about it. Get out there and find them. Don't just keep commissioning from the same people and also to back our talent. You know, in the way that we have with Hanelle. And, you know, unquestioningly, really. We came in behind him and provided the resources she was going to need. And, you know, it wasn't easy. On on the funding and commissioning side, and it shouldn't be that hard. But it is, it's really bloody hard and you know, the process you have to go through as a commissioning platform and for Hanelle and others like you. Not that there are many like you, but but the process is really gruelling and this this continual questioning and justifying that doesn't happen with others. And the only way I can describe it as a structural problem, Shuchi, you're right.

00;48;04;06 - 00;48;28;22

Annie Murray

It's a structurally racist problem, and we need to collectively work on that. We need to fix that. We need to stop it. Yeah. Or as I say, our responsibility is to ask really hard questions of people coming with stories to ensure that they understand the responsibility of telling that story, to make them really question themselves as to whether it's the story to tell and to ask some really tough questions. And we're having some really tough conversations with producers at the moment around this stuff. So it's things like, you know, who's who's, who's

in the story, who's telling the story, who's missing from the story. And most importantly, we don't talk enough about this one who benefits from the story. And by that, I mean, who's making the money here? So when you take on a story that comes from another culture or that includes other cultures that are not your own or other misrepresented or underrepresented groups, think really hard about how you are going to include those groups and ensure that the seat they have at the table as a seat of equal power, and that the sharing of the benefits of that project is shared equally and fairly. And because we're not seeing that, what we're seeing as an untitled taking of stories and not enough questioning by commissioning platforms and not enough questioning by funders.

00;49;42;06 - 00;50;08;04

Shuchi Kothari

Very, very, very good point and very well articulated. The responsibility is, is is for all three, you know, for creatives, as writer directors who are pitching projects to producers who either come on board or commission projects and for funding bodies, both in terms of, you know, broadcasters and funders like New Zealand on Air, New Zealand Film Commission among others. There's this lovely quote, I think, from Benjamin Law, who writes 'Family Law' in Australia, and he talks a lot about how wire power structures of mono colored monocultural. And if you think about, you know, it said, if you think about a workplace or an institution, you would not want everyone to be the same gender, everyone to be the same, you know, ethnicity or everyone. And we need to break that up. And I like what he says. 'If you were to actually apply that idea that we don't want people to be, you know, mono in a working place, it would mean different looking teams and boards all across Australian. (And we can say New Zealand) networks, including SBS Leadership Team, ABC Executive, ABC Board. It takes a generation to be able to take the next generation with them. But in the meantime, gatekeepers need to work harder to stop excluding so many people.

00;51;09;19 - 00;51;30;06

Shuchi Kothari

And I think that's the change needs to happen at all these tiers and otherwise we are always going to be thinking, Well, maybe I'll make this and I will subvert the commercial. I mean, as in networks and do it on YouTube. And I'm not denigrating those who do it on YouTube. YouTube can give you incredible eyeballs. But the trouble is, at the moment, we can't go to New Zealand On Air and say, Give us money to take something to YouTube, at least not yet. And we are very hoping that those things change. We still have certain channels and those channels are full of blockages, then it's as you said, a systemic problem. So it's so wonderful to hear that you're asking these questions of the projects that come to you. And Hanelle I know you want to say something. I'm very keen to hear it all.

00;52;00;15 - 00;52;23;18

Hanelle Harris

Yeah, I think I just really want the opportunity to table the fact that we must not forget that this country is founded on a partnership, on Te Tiriti o Waitangi. There is a founding legal document that actually requires everybody to enter into this partnership. And so yes, while it's monocultural, you know, we have a founding document that actually demands that Tangata Whenua be treated as an equal partner. And so if we cannot at that level understand the partnership, the legal partnership between Māori and and Pakeha, there is no room for diversity to begin. And that's where it needs to start.

00;52;56;17 - 00;53;11;03

Shuchi Kothari

Absolutely. And with with that partnership, you know, that partnership is at many levels, it's not a partnership. It's, you know, we find people who say, Oh, I collaborated or I consulted, I took you into the room, I took you. But true partnership is really about sharing power, and that power could be economic. That power could be something else. And I do want to talk about economic power and take this back to Karin because I know, you know, a few weeks out of election, my god, you know, dear we turn Marxist and talk about access to means of production. But I think it's really important. And Karin, I know you have strong thoughts about this. We've talked about it in other fora. We'd love to hear from you.

00;53;40;27 - 00;54;04;25

Karin Williams

Yeah. I think when we talk about power and when we talk about means of production, yes, we are talking about representation. Yes, we are talking about who's looking through the lens. Yes, we are talking about authentic stories. But for me, the bottom line is economic and I didn't think this up. Barry Barclay thought it up 30 years ago when he talked about exactly the same problem. Some of the same people who 30 years ago, 20 years ago, ten years ago, were receiving millions of dollars from government funders to make screen projects about Maori and Pacific people are still doing that. Eight of the top ten New Zealand box office films are stories about Maori and Pacific people, but only a couple of them are actually owned by Maori people, and those are the films of Taika Waititi, who was mentored by Merata Mita.

00;54;44;02 - 00;54;56;10

Karin Williams

So, you know, I want to acknowledge those who have come before us who went to the barricades and fought to even get a little tiny piece of the pie. But here we are, 30 years later, still having this conversation. Why are we still having this conversation in 2020? You know, when people are marching all around the world, so a true collaboration means giving up power as you've as you've said, Shuchi and Annie, that means sharing not only the creative decision making, but it means sharing the funding and the profits. And there are screen producers and major production companies in this country that have made millions and millions of dollars making stories that they claim are New Zealand stories, and they claim that they have the right to tell, which to me is just a classic example of entitlement.

00;55;43;23 - 00;56;01;12

Karin Williams

These are actually the stories of our ancestors, our forebears, our culture, our people, and to take those stories and to profit from them without consultation or with mere box ticking. Because that's the other thing we're looking at right now is unacceptable. It's unacceptable in 2020. And you know, it really needs to be called out and it really needs to stop at this very moment. As he now says, in Aotearoa, we have major feature films, multi-million dollar feature films funded by the New Zealand Film Commission, major television series about icons of New Zealand, of Māori history and Pacific history being run by all white male creatives, the producers, directors and writers who are the owners of the IP and the contracts and the the profits are not indigenous, and I really think that we need to be looking

at this from a policy level that our public funders need to be really reexamining their policies at a board level, and that we really need to be not putting the responsibility on Hanelle to have to beg for crumbs and to go out to the barricades as a young woman, but on the policy makers, on our elected representatives, on our chief executives of all of these agencies, systemic change, as you say, happens from the top. And it is about economic power. You know, let's be honest about this. This is making money off the backs of indigenous people. It has to stop.

00;57;28;11 - 00;57;46;04

Shuchi Kothari

And you're so right that we cannot be having the same conversations again and again. This is the part that breaks my heart. I think I was saying this to some of you yesterday that when we made '1000 Apologies' as kind of a Asian show about racism and being Asian ten years ago, we were still hoping it be outdated. You should never make a show about racism that is just equally relevant. Ten years later, that's pathetic. That just makes you think, Oh my God, you know you. You rejoice in thinking in that moment that you've done something really politically important. You've said something that'll change the way you move the dial and nothing. So, you know, we all want this to happen and and we often hear from people who are more powerful than us that they want it to happen to. Then what do you think is not happening? How can people up there say to us that actually we want this to happen? We know we want it to happen. So very simple question why isn't it happening? Dana?

00;58;31;21 - 00;58;55;03

Dana Youngman

I think it's about priorities, you know, and and prioritising our voices and giving us the money to give voice to our ideas. And it doesn't feel like we're there yet, and as Annie says and as Karin, you know, from the top down. We need to get to the top. And we need to all get on the same page and we're not there yet. But with projects like this, we're getting there. I truly believe that we are going to get there. It's just. The banging your head against a brick wall is challenging and a lot of us give up. And that's the thing. You know, we've got to stick in there and keep going because that's that's the hardest thing, I think actually, and probably for you, Karin, you've probably felt similarly as a producer that thing of, you know, maybe it's just easier to give up, but we can't. And I think that's what inspired me with SIS. It really has invigorated me in any and I've talked about this. It's invigorated both of us to keep pushing for projects like this and creatives like this.

01;00;05;23 - 01;00;22;15

Shuchi Kothari

Thank you, Dana. Hanelle I have a question for you? You know, when humour is humour, humour is what makes you laugh. Humour is what you. You know, you giggle about things. You know it. It's not like a little treats that, oh, humour is a, you know, it makes you laugh. And yet humour is a thing that people have most arguments about because people would always go, Oh, but who are you making this fall? Who's your audience? And you're going to make it for my people? I know, I know who this is going to. Did you have this space of utter confidence that the humour of SIS was primarily for the people that you were making this show for, but would also resonate for a larger audience? Or did you go? You know what? I don't care about that other audience. It's speaking to the people I want to speak to. What was your sense of, of the funny in SIS?

01;01;02;23 - 01;01;19;24

Hanelle Harris

Oh, yeah, 100%, I never. I, you know, I think there was there's a interview that Merata did, and she said, I make no bones about the fact that I do not make my films for non-Maori. I am Maori. You know, I make my films about my lived experience. You know, I'm paraphrasing. But you know, she goes on to mention that everything is made for white people. Why can't we just have one or two things that are made for us? And you know, that's exactly how I feel. You know, I don't see things on, on TV or in the cinema. I don't see programs, projects that reflect me and my friends, me and my cousins, me and my, my family, my son.

And for me, I was brought up with all boys, and you know, me and my boy cousins, we roast each other a lot and, you know, we're very humorous. We're very, very funny people. And whenever I make anything, I genuinely think is my cousin Hoani, or is my cousin Hori gonna love this because at the end of the day, when my people feel sane, when they feel validated and authentically represented on screen, that to me matters more than any critical review than any award than any mainstream success. I'm a mother and I want to leave this world better than when I came into it. I want to leave this world knowing that my daughter has brown women on screen that she can see herself in. I grew up in an era where Charmed and Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Party of Five, Roswell. Those were all the shows that I grew up with. That was my pop culture. None of those shows had brown women, let alone brown or even black people in. Plus they're American. And so for me, when I started creating work, it was literally just about wanting to see ourselves as everyday normal parts of society, you know, and particularly as a young Maori woman and as a mother, I really wanted to break away from the damaging, trauma driven narratives that have continued to be made in New Zealand. You know, and I just wanted to see young, successful brown women. You know, I just wanted to see a reflection of us. That was it. And so when I create, I never think of what the fuck mainstream wants.

01;04;01;17 - 01;04;15;15

Hanelle Harris

I don't care. They've got they've got literally an entire they've got entire streaming services dedicated to them. Why can't we just have these one or two? Or, you know, we should have more. But you know, this is for us. This is for my people and especially for our young girls, for our young wahine out there.

01;04;22;17 - 01;04;43;25

Shuchi Kothari

Thank you, Hanelle. I'm going to take this idea to Daniel because obviously I completely understand as a person of colour what Hanelle is talking about. But I also know that when you guys sit around the table, you're not going, This is this show is going to be for the Pasifika audience or Māori audience or the Asian audience in on comedy channel. How do you make these choices and calculated risks with confidence that this show actually will translate, even though that may not be the intent of the team that made it? Because, you know, obviously I know what Hanelle is saying in terms of politically and culturally and emotionally remaining true to your content. But how do you flip from there due to the decisions that go around your table?

01;05;13;15 - 01;05;26;17

Daniel Morrison

For us, like as much as this definitely, of course, has a really strong local voice, I think it's when you're looking at the sketches in themselves, they have these universal themes that transcend just what the local audience at home, yes, you're seeing yourself on screen, but it's also talking about issues that everyone would speak about. There's stuff about sexual health, sexuality. There's other things that you know in, like what we're talking about. It might like what you're saying as people march around the world right now and there's racial profiling going on, and you say that in the supermarket sketch. And as much as you might be this person that sees that happening, you ignore it. It is something that's going on and that's actually you're seeing it on screen. So they are these like issues that everyone has seen in their life or is dealt with in particular ones. But as much as it's in a different voice to you, you're still having the same experience of that a lot of the time. And I think that was kind of what draw us to SIS as well that we did say initially, like push the boundaries with this show.

That's what I guess Comedy Central, especially in the US, is known for having shows that kind of have dealt with issues that haven't been spoken about before, like Broad City was meant to be groundbreaking in that way and Key & Peele as well, that they dealt with things that other shows hadn't talked about yet.

01;06;25;15 - 01;06;39;07

Daniel Morrison

And I feel like SIS definitely had that flavour in that tone of voice that we went. Yes, it's all fit on Comedy Central because this is something that's pushing and doing something no one else is. And I think that's what makes this decision easier for us when we're like, Yes, we see these themes, everyone's going to relate to that. Yes, it's in the local voice. For at end of the day, it's still funny, and that's what makes it easy for us.

01;06;44;05 - 01;07;04;28

Shuchi Kothari

Right? Because I mean, you know, comedy is the safest way to be dangerous, isn't it? Comedy's such a great way to be dangerous, but it's a safe way to be dangerous because you can include somebody in that laugh in the way that into you with that feeling and that you're not always the butt of the joke. And also feels something in terms of, I think one of the reviewers who talked about your work had said that, you know, that she was so used to seeing fragmented characterization because you only get bits right? And and she said, I was so nervous about watching SIS because I'm so used to seeing myself on screen as a fragmented character. And it was so lovely to see fully rounded people, three dimensional people. And you have cleverly, I think, very cleverly taken those positions by having different positions in the writers room of SIS. So, you know, to me, there's a kind of a very clever way in which you're anticipating the the multifaceted discourse, even among people of colour, right, that people would say, Well, this is not this is not me. This is me. This is and you've taken the kind of multiple positions by placing these three very different writers in the writers room led by Tom. So there was a kind of a clever way of including an audience that may potentially feel excluded. And I think there's another bit somewhere where you talked about the notes that you used to get and how you use those notes to always sometimes bring in the kind of question the audience may ask and put that in so that if the audience is going to ask that maybe one of your characters can ask about, and that way you're including that

dissenting voice as against excluding that dissenting voice. And I think these are very beautiful ways of a dynamic process of writing that takes into account not just people who think like us, but people from our communities who may not necessarily think like us that we do want to hail and include in a conversation. And maybe it was a scene with the kava bowl. Do you want to address that a little bit? one of you. What had happened in terms of that particular note and how that you included that in a scene? Because I find that, you know, those kinds of details really speak to a culture of safety, collaboration, faith and kind of, you know, trust between EP's and producers and writers and commissioners.

01;09;22;08 - 01;09;46;02

Hanelle Harris

Yeah, I mean, it was interesting because when we first myself, Destiny and Maya, Destiny and Maya are both Samoan, when we when we were brainstorming about sketch ideas, you know, obviously we want to we wanted to pay homage again to all of the films that we'd grown up watching. And I think one of our references was just body swap as a genre and off of the you know, off off of that. You know, we we knew right away that we wanted a sketch that looked at gender inequality between brown women and brown men. Obviously, that genre already throws up that magic of sorts needs to be used, a potion or whatnot. And we were also in a separate sketch. We wanted to look at what happens when we stuck with traditional culture as young people who sometimes don't understand the original intention of the way in which our tupuna, our ancestors did things. So we checked those two things together, and we came up with the kava bowl sketch. And when we initially sent the draft, then we got the note back that, you know, that kava is a sacred tradition that shouldn't be fucked with. And we thought, Well, that's the point of what we were trying. That's why they get punished. That's why they body swap Karin our EP obviously, was also helping us navigate those notes. And she said, me and you know know, the men in my family, they drink it as a casual thing in the garage. They get together and they casually talanoa around, you know, around kava. And so what I was observing were two Pacific women who had had two very different connections well four, four very different points of view around what kava means to them and their whanau.

01;11;30;04 - 01;11;48;26

Hanelle Harris

And as we were kind of, you know, playing with like, how are we going to apply this note because Dana was very much like, this is not, you know, this is not something you play with. And you know, it was just everyone's points of view were very clear, which was amazing because just like women, just like our points of view as women, all vary, our points of view as brown people all vary. And we thought, Well, why can't we just add that, you know, complication? Because as we know, great great writing is about conflict. And so if you have a character, and what we did was we literally just put the the notes in the words of of of one of the lead characters. And we just had her saying like, we shouldn't be fucking with this, you know, this is really like sacred stuff, you know, and she's not really sure about it. You know, I think when you have an opportunity to unpack all these different perspectives within within your within your piece. And yeah. And I think it ended up, you know, actually really elevating the sketch that note. So yeah, it was a great, great example of a construct of note that came from lived experience. And, you know, it just really sharpened the sophistication of the writing.

01;13;00;07 - 01;13;20;11

Shuchi Kothari

And you can't do that. You could do this because you had four characters. Can you imagine if you have like a show where there's one token brown person, there's no multiplicity of brownness possible when you have the one brown friend or the one, you know, sidekick or the one funny one in the ensemble. And I've always kind of regretted this so much, and I love that line from Aziz Ansari is one of his Master of None. But he says, Why can't you have two Indians why? why? And the whole thing is like, No, we can only have one. And it's the thing about that multiplicity that we seek, the dimensionality that we seek. What we see around us, we rarely get a chance to represent in our work because we are often reduced to the, you know, to the spice, the flavours of the dish. The one thing so I really appreciated that kind of plurality in the writing, which allowed for different ways to be brown also possible because I think that's equally important if you talk about inclusive storytelling. We've got about 15-20 minutes to take questions.

01;14;06;15 - 01;14;27;29

Shuchi Kothari

So if you have any questions, please send them through the Q&A and I will ask them to panellists. You can have specific questions or you could just have, you know, I think there was a questionnaire done for you about the reception outside New Zealand or SIS. And can you talk to that a little bit?

01;14;29;27 - 01;14;47;17

Daniel Morrison

Yeah, I think just to preface it with SIS, when we originally commissioned it with Prime and Sky that it could only be licensed like as the full version in New Zealand, on like, like on TV, but then on digital, we had it available for Australia and New Zealand said the whole special itself was only across those two regions. Having said that, though, we sent on the project to our UK team, who are kind of like our international heads and there was a lot of interest from their side, as well as the when we were doing our promotional support for this in the lead up to its launch. The UK page, which has got millions of followers, said one of the supermarkets and everything on the day of launch and there was a few other pieces of content that kind of hit audiences outside of Australia and New Zealand as well from our social pages.

So we definitely saw that pick up in the social elements that we put out there. But we did say it had great results both across Australia and New Zealand, as well as an original series. But yeah, there was definitely interest from international parts of the business. We had people from America asking, like, What is this? Like tell us more about it. And we also had like South African channel that we have as well going, Oh, this is great. I'd like to know more about it kind of thing. So it's it's definitely. And then obviously the like when you call it the want, what we want to do with it is make more of it. So that's everyone's kind of interested in the next round of like what's going to happen with this. So they're definitely interested parties and it's caught the attention of all over the world now, which has been great.

01;16;02;00 - 01;16;14;26

Shuchi Kothari

So thank you. Thank you so much. Hanelle there's a question here where someone wants to talk a little bit more about process, and I know you've discussed the writers room. Can you talk a little bit about the directorial process?

01;16;17;21 - 01;16;41;27

Hanelle Harris

Yes, so I as I mentioned, I had a directing partner Leki Jackson Burke and Leki has a, you know, as a long time friend and also a longtime collaborator on, you know, other things. But Leki hasn't transitioned or hadn't transitioned yet to directing for screen. So he's he's very well respected in the theatre space. And just that desire to, you know, grow an industry where I have contemporaries that also make work so that the burden of representation for the young Pacific Maori voice doesn't always land on me, it was like, you know, I've been trying of yank him into doing some screening stuff for a while. So this was really the perfect opportunity. And I know that some people on our crew were really nervous about, Oh, how is it going to work with two directors essentially? And so Leki really was my backbone. You know, he was my my partner. And that whole period, and especially because I was heavily pregnant, I was six to seven months pregnant. And so you can imagine like going back and forth between set and to the actors was going to be a lot for me. And so, you know, right from pre-production and right through to the shoot, Leki and I just quickly identified where our strengths were. We moved as one unit through all of the show day meetings, the rehearsals, and we just really played to strengths.

Leki choreographed all of the kind of the dancing everything around that on screen, but he primarily looked after those actors, you know, and really was was my, you know, for my actors was really their support person and they really leant on him and I really leant on him for performance.

01;18;17;22 - 01;18;44;17

Hanelle Harris

And then, you know, obviously having a lot of television directing credits, I was technically a lot more experienced. And so, you know, myself and my DP definitely had the the kind of closer communication. But Leckie was there through everything in terms of shot listing and location reces and tech reces where we would talk about where we were setting up the camera and everything, you know. And it was such a beautiful moment in that supermarket because it had been a week of shooting by that point. And it was such a beautiful moment like blocking out the scene and me and drew the DP talking about coverage and like going, Oh, you know, when we were shot listing is that when you guys drew that thing is that when you talked about this particular tracking shot and I was like, Yes, and he was like that so buzzy, like, you know, and that for me, like, that's why I do what I do like because, you know, knowledge should be shared and and it was so meaningful to me to be able to, you know, often directors want to come and shadow, and so it's just like a visit on set. But I really believe that if you're committed to being a director or to directing your own stuff and you need the experience, actually, for me personally, the real directing takes place in the in pre-production. It's when you're breaking down your scripts, that's when you're making your casting decisions. It's when you're making your shot list, when you're talking about tone and you're talking about lighting and tech and everything that's directing to me. On set, when you're actually, you know, on the day when you're there, that's all of your preparation coming into play, you know, all the work being done. So, yeah, I mean, the process on this was

unique because with Gaby Leki and the two writers, it was all capacity building. And so on one hand, we're doing a job. On one hand, we're directing a show. But on the other hand, you know, there was a capacity building. A tuakana / teina building component there. And so how do we hold space as people?

01;20;42;23 - 01;21;02;11

Hanelle Harris

And this is what I have a real problem with in this country is this attachment of young talent. And in this non reciprocity. You know, if you're going to take a a in turn producer on. It is a reciprocal thing, they're not your PA, they're not your bum boy, they're not someone to go and run take your dog to the vet. That is not what you're getting funding to do. You are getting funding to actually meaningfully engage and mentor this person so that once they leave your project, they can go and make their own shit. And, you know, I'm so blessed that I had people like Karin and Sima because they truly invested in me, and now I have Annie and Dana, you know, these are people that truly meaningfully and this then to you as a as a new filmmaker, as an emerging filmmaker, and that's what we need to see more of. Because what I'm seeing across the board when I look across to all my mates on these big productions, they're being exploited, and they're being used and they're being attached. It's a box ticking tokenistic exercise, and it really needs to stop. You know, that doesn't answer your question and answer something else, but I'm glad I got it off my chest.

01;22;11;15 - 01;22;25;02

Shuchi Kothari

No, no, you did. And that was important, too. But you did talk about your co-directing process, and that is important because it is, you know, it is always a bit of a how do you co-direct? How do two directors is so much about the vision and one director and how do you? So I'm sure the person who asked that question find it useful. Yeah. Annie and Dana, there's a question for you saying, Will when will Annie and Dana be next taking applications to pitch? I have a web series that I've created covering diversity, mental health and addiction recovery, and I have completed a pilot episode, smile, there is something for you to see. Is there a good time for them to come to you? Or, as they say, when are you taking applications for pitches next?

01;22;57;08 - 01;23;18;10

Dana Youngman

We're always open. So the best way to get your ideas through is probably through our Sky Originals email address, so you could send a two pager letting us know about your idea to skyoriginals@sky.co.nz.

01;23;18;10 - 01;23;18;24

Dana Youngman

Is it?

01;23;19;07 - 01;23;22;16

Annie Murray

It might be Sky Dot original originals. Yeah.

01;23;23;07 - 01;23;28;01

Dana Youngman

Yeah, it's sky.originals@sky.co.nz And just send it through and we'll be in touch.

01;23;30;07 - 01;23;50;21

Shuchi Kothari

And we are getting close to that time, and we have to wrap up so individually things that are practical. Practical tips, something that someone can go, Oh my God, I should remember to do that the next time I'm either pitching or the next time I'm, you know, working with a writer or the next time that I'm trying to get international company involved in my work or the next time I'm seeking an EP. Because my god, you know I'm young and I can never get anything across a line without a good ep. Everyone wants an EP. All these questions.

So one by one. Any kind of, you know, clear tips that you could give for those in the audience who might be seeking that information. And we can start with Daniel.

01;24;16;05 - 01;24;30;29

Daniel Morrison

From my perspective, I would say kind of from this example of SIS itself as well, having that pilot episode was just such a helpful thing to get that over the line to like hear a tone of voice, say something that stylistically, you know, in that world. Having said that as well, I understand people don't have the budget that maybe Hanelle had set aside for. So with that, though, like we're consuming content on all different platforms now, and it does not have to be the most like, you know, HD quality or that kind of thing. If you've got a certain tone of voice that you're going for, that you can capture in some way, that's always going to put with your like two page of pitch or something just to like, actualize that idea. And that kind of gives such a better sense and a better flavour for someone looking at words on a page. It brings it to life so much better for us. I would just say any attempts that you can do with like people around you that can support you, like friends that are talented and like either producing or editing whatever anyone that can help you to put something together so that when you're putting in front of people like us or Sky or NZ On Air, it's just good to have that reference point. And I think that just just gives you a leg up when you're doing this process, for sure.

01;25;23;20 - 01;25;26;07

Shuchi Kothari

Thank you. Karin, do you have something?

01;25;28;05 - 01;25;45;25

Karin Williams

Yeah, I think I'm Dana and Annie both mentioned that when Hanelle and Gabby pitched since their pitch was very professional, it was rehearsed and it was confident. And when I saw their application, frankly, it was one of the best applications I've ever seen. It was beautifully presented, it was beautifully thought out and it was spelled correctly. People hate me because I'm a grammar Nazi, but please, you know, if you're going to submit things to funders, to networks, to commissioners, make sure it looks good. And for goodness sake, check your spelling. You'd be shocked and horrified at how many people submit things that are riddled with typos and grammatical errors. If you can't do it, get somebody who can.

01;26;18;10 - 01;26;21;00

Shuchi Kothari

Thank you. Dana, do you have a tip?

01;26;22;24 - 01;26;46;09

Dana Youngman

I'm probably picking up on what Karin said, absolutely. And also realising that, you know, we're in it together. So, you know, we want to work together with you. And when we're commissioning a show, we want the very best for your project and we want as many people watching your wonderful work as possible. And it's very much a collaboration, and I think that was the wonderful thing working with Hanelle and Karin is that there was a lot of trust, and actually coming to the table with trust is very important because you need to trust that your idea is safe with us and trust that we have the best intentions for your baby. Really. And I think trust is probably what got this over the line so beautifully between Daniel and Sky /Prime. You know, we worked very, very well together and there was there was trust there in the same between Karin and Hanelle and us.

01;27;30;12 - 01;27;32;17

Dana Youngman

So that's probably my advice.

01;27;34;00 - 01;27;34;13

Shuchi Kothari

Annie?

01;27;36;14 - 01;27;54;24

Annie Murray

A really practical thing. Watch the platform. Watch what you're pitching to know, what they've got. Know where there might be a gap. Look at the funding decisions and see what's in production and get a real feel for what that commissioner might want. And one of the first questions the commissioner can hear is, So what are you looking for? It's a really lazy question, and it shows that you haven't done your research. So do your research. And the beauty of Prime and Sky is that we have many platforms, so there's a chance that what you're pitching may work for one of them, but it really helps if you come knowing you know where it might fit. So there's that. And also keep it brief initially, you know, if you don't have the resource to shoot something and not everybody does just a paragraph, really, in the first instance or a page is enough. Don't don't spend heaps of time and money on a big piece of work when you know, we might say, Look, we've already got it or we've already declined it three times this year or something similar. So it's like, keep it really short and concise and and just send an email in the first place, and that will give you some feedback. If we're interested, then we'll have a chat.

01;29;02;29 - 01;29;04;07

Shuchi Kothari

Hanelle, from you?

01;29;07;08 - 01;29;32;03

Hanelle Harris

I just wanted to say, firstly, even though we had money or we had the resources to shoot the pilot for SIS, back when I started my very first short film I did out of film school. The Promise of Piha, we crowdfunded that and we got three or \$4,000 and we shot it over three or four days. And again, with the Baby Mamas Club pilot that was self-funded for maybe 1500 or two grand over a two day shoot and we hustled, hustled our asses off. I don't come from money. I've got young children. You know, I definitely don't have any economic resource.

When I first started, I was definitely going, you know, I was funding things or going out there and doing a boosted or a pledge me. These are all, in my opinion, privileges afforded to us that people like Merata and Barry did not have. So I personally think it's a lazy excuse to say, Oh, well, I don't have the money to shoot something. You know, there are so many ways to find the money. And at the end of the day, if you're a producer, that's going to be your job anyway. So if you can't find a couple grand, you know, and you're going to go and ask for \$500,000 or \$1,000,000 or whatever, you know, be a producer. Go hustle for that money and get something made. Because even when you know when we were trying to mood board for Baby Mama's Club, there were no pictures of Maori and Pacific women that we could use for our mood board. We got together a couple hundred dollars. We got a great photographer that we didn't know. We reached out to him on Instagram. We said, We love your work. This is our kaupapa, we've got no money. Will you support us? And he said yes, and that's how we got our initial imagery for the Baby Mamas Club prop. So we there's a will, there's a way.

Secondly, my second tip would be watch local content, watch everything and anything that's coming out of the industry. Know your market, know your industry and read the credits. I found Drew McGeorge our DOP because I loved my friend Roseanne Liang's short film Do No Harm. And I asked her to e-intro us because I could just see visually that's where I wanted SIS to be at that level. I'd also watched Stallone's films and Hibiscus and Roofless and three wise cousins, and I loved the way that it was cut. I thought the timing and the comedy was perfect. So again, you read the credits, and that's where I found Jack Woon, and I reached out to him and I said, I loved the way that you cut, will you consider this project? So I really get to know your industry and get to know who's out there technically, not just producers and EPs and writers technically who's out there, because that's why the production value of SIS looks so good.

01;32;14;01 - 01;32;18;21

Hanelle Harris

There was a third point, but I've forgotten it, but I think those are two great tips. Anyway.

01;32;19;11 - 01;32;38;22

Shuchi Kothari

Thank you. Thank you so much. And if all of us can unmute our mics because I do really want to give Hanelle a round of applause. She has achieved something amazing and in a humility. I know she always talks about everybody else who was involved, but I think what she's pulled off is spectacular and we and she's off on such an incredible journey. So, Hanelle, thank you. Thank you very, very much for being the voice and being the force that you've been. And I do want to thank SPADA. I also want to kind of reach out to the audience and say that, you know, sometimes masterclasses are very much about craft and they're great. And that's actually usually the masterclasses that we encourage. But occasionally masterclasses have to go bigger into talking about philosophy. And so if you felt like God,

you know, I didn't get to learn enough about how Hanelle dealt with improvisation or how she dealt with - I'm sure there'll be other fora and maybe will get her know to do some recordings that are endless free time her and put them up. But but I think for her now, this philosophical discussion was important, for SIS it was important for Annie and Dana and Karin, and for Dan, it was important. So thank you very much for coming to this with such openness and trust. And thank you, SPADA

01;33;39;01 - 01;33;52;13

Ness Simons

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