ESSENTIAL NOLA CINEMA

Episode 8: Nichola Pino on EASY RIDER

Nicholas Pino: Check. Check. One, two. Okay. Nice. [Music]

Randy Mack: I'm not strict about audio interruptions and stuff like dogs barking or whatever. It's all part of the charm, [Laughter] as they say.

NP: Yes, good. You're not Marc Maron.

RM: The premise of the show is always to sort of combine what I like best about the three dozen or so podcasts I listen to regularly about filmmaking, which is how personality is front and center in Marc Maron's podcasts and how I've used that show to really get to know and understand so many comedic performers, writers and so forth. At the same time, there's all these other shows that are historical or go into dives, but I found the best conversations tend to be when two people get together with a mutual third-party topic or film or artifact or something they both have a lot to talk about, but it's not about each other so nobody feels like they're in the spotlight. You know what I mean? How's it going? What neighborhood do you live in?

NP: CTC, man. Lower 9th.

RM: Cool. I was wondering because I just went through your reel and saw so many of your films are set in Algiers Point.

NP: Are we starting? Is this recording?

RM: Well, okay. Let me do a quick intro and then I'll ask you that question and we can just kick it off like nothing happened. [Laughter] I may have to use all of this actually. It's funny. Welcome to Essential NOLA Cinema, a podcast where a filmmaker - shit. [Laughter] Welcome to Essential NOLA Cinema, a podcast where I interview a filmmaker from the New Orleans area about a New Orleans-made movie of their choosing. Today I'm with Nicholas Manuel Pino. Is it Pino or Piño?

NP: It's Pino.

RM: Pino. Okay.

NP: There's no tilde.

RM: Are you a Nick? Is that what your friends call you?

NP: Yes, people call me Nick.

RM: Cool. Today he chose Easy Rider, the 1969 era-defining Dennis Hopper, Peter Fonda vehicle – no pun intended. He's made several short films, many music videos, lots of commercials. He's the hardest working man in New Orleans. It's very impressive, as a filmmaker in a city where film is kind of like a redheaded stepchild, kind of fourth-tier art form, to see how prolific you've been. It looks like you've got a finger in almost every artistic pie. Having a music side to you, webisodes, short films, narrative short films, all kinds of commercial work. It's very impressive. Can I ask how old you are?

NP: I'm 33.

RM: Cool. You're off to a great start.

NP: And I like pies.

RM: Yes. Well, pies. I mean, Hubig's RIP. Although I heard Hubig's is coming back. Did you hear that?

NP: I've been hearing that for a long time.

RM: [Laughter] Yes. I live in the Hubig's neighborhood. I got to watch it burn down from a block away. It was very sad. The smell of that neighborhood has never been the same since. So, the last big project I'm aware of is "The Funeral Band," the short film that played at the New Orleans Film Festival starring Tony Frederick and Derrick Freeman and a whole bunch of other local actors and musicians and so forth. I was out of town for that festival. So, I missed it at the time, but when I caught up with it, I was damn impressed with all levels of it, especially the writing. Writing it seems to be like the redheaded stepchild of the redheaded stepchild art form in the city, and seeing something with just a really good script was super refreshing. Of course, it's really well directed too. It sounds like you came up through the camera department. Is that correct?

NP: Well, I started pretty much as a musician. I played music in this town for 12 years with various bands, including like Kirk Joseph from the Dirty Dozen, his band, and then Derrick's band, and then I had a band called Jealous Monk for years. So, when music videos were starting to get - when videos started to become a commodity again, I needed someone to direct my music videos. So, I paid a couple of people to do them and was very not impressed and not happy with the results. So, then I bought a used T4i back in the day and then just started shooting, and then people saw the work and were like, "Oh, that's pretty good. You want to do one for us?" I was like, "Wait, I could like make money during the week doing something instead of just playing late nights and being a vampire." So. that's kind of how it all started for me, mixing the love of music as well as film. I've always loved film. Now that it was democratized where you can buy a camera that you could afford and make something nice, like a DSLR. It just fell into my hands.

RM: Yes, that's great. It sounds like a super organic way of getting into it. Tell us about where you come from and how you arrived in New Orleans.

NP: I'm originally from Elizabeth, New Jersey, right outside Newark. I came to New Orleans in '02 to go to school at Loyola for music industry studies, and the city just welcomed me. The city was really good to me as a musician, just hanging out at the Maple Leaf. I started falling into sets with Johnny Vidacovich and George Porter and Ivan Neville and meeting all these other people and ended up playing a bunch of Jazz Fest and…

RM: That's awesome.

NP: The rest is history. It’s 20 years now I’ve been here, almost; 18 years, almost half my life.

RM: What do you play? Was Jealous Monk the band you were with at Jazz Fest?

NP: No, I was with Kirk Joseph’s band at Jazz Fest a bunch of times. I was a rapper too. I produced music. I produced music for different films. I did score, like a bunch of stuff for the Equalizer film that shot down here. I did a bunch of jazz sessions for them through friends in LA.

RM: That's great. That's Antoine Fuqua. Right?

NP: Yes. They just send you stuff that they need sound-alikes for. They’re just like, “Okay, we can't use…”

RM: Oh, I got you. [Laughter] Yes, sound-alikes is a hilarious thing.

NP: “We can't use Miles Davis. We need something almost blue,” [Laughter] Kind of Blue.

RM: A kind-of “Kind of Blue. [Laughter] Yes, that's cool. That's an interesting side of Hollywood south that you don’t hear too much about, the postproduction side.

NP: Yes. Over at Esplanade, they do that all the time. Misha...?

RM: Yes, I know, he's produced records for friends of mine.

NP: Jay Weigel. Jay Weigel is a legend doing - there's a lot of talent here. As you saw in The Funeral Band, music is very important to me. We recorded all that music specifically for the film. We snuck into Loyola studio. [Laughter]

RM: The music in The Funeral Band is perfect. There's a really fine line you have to walk between the quality of a studio thing but the looseness and liveness of the performance that's happening in front of the camera. Plus, you have the whole question of matching the acoustics and things. It’s really difficult. I use music extensively throughout my films. Laundry Day has a live band performance that you see sort of play out in pieces because we're visiting this one moment in a bar multiple times over the course of the same day but told through different people's perspectives. So, I had to figure out the live recordings to do. So, we had a tempo and we set an E for the singer to work around, and then we just laid in all kinds of live recordings [Laughter] to try to figure out how that would work. I made a promise to myself that the next time I use a live band, I'm actually going to use a real band instead of actors in a band, which is…

NP: It's interesting trying to do something like that.

RM: Yes, you did it great. So, tell me about how Easy Rider came onto your radar. Where were you when you saw it? Do you remember your first impression?

NP: I came across Easy Rider probably during my college years through a friend. We just... the wild college years in New Orleans, like you do a lot of fun things. Smoking weed, dropping a little acid here and there. So, Easy Rider seemed like something that I guess

he thought I would like, and I really did like it. Even though some people don't get it, but I feel like it's more pertinent now than it was when I saw it then. Now, rewatching it the other day...

RM: Yes, I agree. Actually, it's a film that casts a very long shadow culturally, not just cinema history, but just in the broader culture of things. So many film and music cliches were originated... They came from that film, when they were brand new ideas that no one had ever tried before, and then quickly became cliches. So, Easy Rider was a film that I thought I knew before I even saw it. I thought "I know what this is all about." And then when I finally sat down to watch it for the first time, which was I'm ashamed to say only a couple years ago, I caught up with it. There was an extended rerelease extra features, and interviews with everybody and all that, Blu Ray.

NP: That's like 50 years or something.

RM: Exactly. It's a '69 film, so it must have been '09? I was blown away. I was just like, I couldn't believe how good it was, and how fresh it felt. Like it didn't feel like all the knockoff films that it inspired in the 70s. László Kovács' photography is just unbelievable. *[00:10:00]*

NP: It really did shake up so many things. Like, it was one of the first movies to use sound music instead of a score. Besides, I guess the graduates credited it with the first one. I feel like Easy Rider, it's a time capsule of the time because of the music. And because of doing that, and because of taking a little bit of the French New Wave model of just doing it and just going out and doing it. Yes, the cinematography is beautiful because it's imperfect. That started the whole Hollywood New Wave of the '70s. The director driven new wave that gave birth to so many great films and directors.

RM: The Making of Easy Rider is fascinating. There's so much to... Like on the internet right now, just old interviews with all of the principal people at various stages over their long careers, talking about it, cleaning up the record and contradicting themselves and so on and so on. I think part of the energy of the film is that the filmmakers took so many risks making it. I mean, the cinematography on the motorcycles alone is like... Those are really those actors riding those motorcycles with their hands over their heads, no hands on the handlebars.

NP: Playing chicken.

RM: Doing all of their own riding and driving. Yes, it's just crazy. I thought, "Oh my God". It was like nobody was minding the store. Like, that's the director on the motorcycle! [Laughter]

NP: Well, Dennis Hopper was.

RM: It's so funny. And like László, leaning out of a car, probably it's like one guy to hold him in and an 80-pound camera on his shoulder. The reason this is considered a New Orleans film is the Mardi Gras sequence at the end, which only accounts for, I don't know…

NP: The third act, I guess.

RM: Fifteen minutes of the film.

NP: 20 minutes.

RM: When I looked it up apparently, that was the first stuff they shot.

NP: Yes. Because they wanted to get Mardi Gras in.

RM: Yes, exactly. The story seems to be that a production company called BBS. which is Rafelson and Bert Schneider.

NP: Bert Schneider, yes.

RM: The Monkees.

NP: Monkees money.

RM: The Monkees money, exactly. Hopper and Peter Fonda of course are both like [00:12:00] children of Hollywood. Hopper came up with James Dean and he's in two of the three James Dean movies and he was a child actor. And so was Peter Fonda obviously the son of Henry Fonda, and they were just desperate to shake off anything old Hollywood, they wanted nothing to do with. They had this like deep hunger to redefine themselves as part of the cultural moment and not as part of some old Hollywood legacy. They went to Bert Schneider and they said... At some point, they're describing the movie that they want to make to him and he says, "What's the budget?" They didn't really have a budget and so Peter Fonda says, he just named $360,000 off the top of his head because that's what Roger Corman had made Wild Angels for.

Wild Angels was the biker movie that he had just done. So, he just thought that's two biker movies, same budget, no problem. Schneider was like, "Okay, but let's do a little test." He gave him $40,000, and he sent them to Mardi Gras. The idea was that they would come back with footage and then they would greenlight the rest of it if they liked what they saw. That's where they got completely wasted on acid and all these kinds of now famous making-of, behind-the-scenes lore of driving. Peter Fonda had a nervous breakdown in the cemetery by…

NP: Yes, talking about his mother.

RM: The death of his mom, which is some harsh shit. But Dennis Hopper got a reputation for being a pretty harsh director over the years. Apparently, they were all - the infighting was insane. Talk about like interesting lessons you can learn by shooting the end of the film first, which is basically a devolution into complete chaos. Using that as the beginning of a crew that's like learning how to work together and everything actually dissolving into actual chaos. It becomes like Truffaut's quote about every film was a

documentary about the making of itself. You end up with the chaos of the production on screen, and then you tack it in at the end of the movie so the movie opens with a crew that's like now a well-oiled machine who knows what they're doing and knows how it's all working. Everyone's got the roles all sorted out. The beginning of the film is like, I think, the strongest part, the first 60 minutes or so. And then when the whole thing just kind of goes off a cliff, [Laughter] it's exactly perfect for what they were trying to do with the film anyway. So then, it ended up being - the process ended up supporting the product, which is kind of the dream scenario for a filmmaker.

NP: That it imitates the shoot is hard, that's hard to come by, because like, I could imagine after the stories that I heard about that, I'm surprised they even made the rest of the movie. After the stuff that I heard Dennis Hopper was doing.

RM: No, it's true.

NP: It was hardbecause they're both writing, they're both producing, they're both directing.

RM: And both starring, which is crazy.

NP: Yes, and both starring. Well, that's like a piece out of a Roger Corman's book. Like B movie king over there. Like everyone came up through Corman and he was just - this is like the first movie that was really respected that has been done in that style because it wasn't just an invasion or attack of something, it was just people. Just it was people on the search for freedom at the end of this huge era, because this is the end of the whole free love days.

RM: Yes. Absolutely.

NP: They film in '68 and shot in '69, and it was like the assassination of Robert Kennedy, Altamont…

RM: And Martin Luther King.

NP: Martin Luther King.

RM: Nixon gets reelected - or sorry, elected for the first time.

NP: The Manson Murders.

RM: Crazy.

NP: This is a crazy time. The middle of like the Vietnam…

RM: Yes, Vietnam was peaking. You've got this fascinating fallout that... What I find really interesting about the late 60s is how the disillusionment with the Flower Power hippie kids thing was palpable for certain artists but not for others. A whole set of artists, musicians and filmmakers who are still really into it and still making kind of this hippie dippy stuff. And then you have a small subset, a more kind of guerrilla, independently-minded subset who are like, "No, this whole thing is like crashing to the ground in front of us."

NP: Yes, they blew it.

RM: Yes, exactly. That's where Terry Southern came in. Terry Southern wrote those monologues that break up the music montages.

NP: Depends on who you talk to.

RM: Well, of course it does. [Laughter]

NP: Dennis Hopper says that he didn't write anything. He didn't write one fucking word. Man.

RM: Peter Fonda says that Southern wrote all the best stuff [Laughter] and Southern is not around to defend himself, but the story Peter Fonda tells is that Southern was - he made Dr. Strangelove for Stanley Kubrick in ’62 or something. So, he was a huge novelist, part of the counterculture, that Ken Kesey, sort of post-Beatnik set of American novelists. Southern was a satirist too. So, he was making millions of dollars in Hollywood as a ghostwriter to try to add that “youth movement authenticity” to all these scripts without getting credit and stuff. When Southern heard Fonda was making a movie, he called him up and said, “What's this Easy Rider thing you're working on?” and he told them and he said, “I'd love to help you” and he said, “Terry, your rate is bigger than our entire budget.” Terry said, “No, I'll just do it for free. I don't care. I just want to help you guys out. I want to do something that feels real and not peppering up Cleopatra” or whatever the hell he was doing as a ghostwriter.

NP: Make Cleopatra feel younger. “We need her to get to the youth, can she be a hippie?”

RM: Yes, put some flowers in her hair. It's a fascinating one time only amalgam of creative talent coming together at the right historical moment. It’s kind of a curio because when I watched it in preparation for this conversation. I noticed there's a back-and-forth structure, where there'll be a scene and there's…

NP: Riding.

RM: These montages. Riding montages sometimes, I mean, often in the first 30 minutes that are set to music, the Steppenwolf Born to be Wild thing. I counted five of them in the first 30 minutes, which is crazy. So, you've got one scene and then a music montage, and then one scene and then a music montage, very little dialogue. The first line of dialogue happens eight minutes into the film, and there's probably only like a page worth of dialogue for the first 20 minutes or so. Like the whole business swapping the…

NP: Yes, the coke.

RM: With the guy in the Rolls-Royce?

NP: Yes, playing out with nothing but airplane noise, which was cool for like five minutes. I can imagine being in the theater hearing that, how loud that must have been. That's a bold choice.

RM: I love some of those angles there too. Shooting two-shots using the side mirror on the truck. I wonder how much of that was Hopper and how much of that was just Kovács'? Because it's hard to imagine. Did you ever see anything Hopper directed after Easy Rider?

NP: The other day, I tried watching, what was it, The Last…?

RM: The Last Movie, right?

NP: The Last Movie, yes, and I didn't really get through it. What else has he directed? *[00:20:00]*

RM: That's the thing. I think by the time he died, he only had I want to say four or five titles to his credit. A lot of them were films like The Last Movie, which were kind of films that burned out at some point and that had to be cobbled together post-factum, or that sat in cans for 20 years, because he didn't have the wherewithal, the financing or whatever to finish them. He was a hell of an actor and clearly had a talent with directing. I mean, you think about Easy Rider's... what postproduction on Easy Rider must have been like, the editing of that film is a miracle. I mean, the editing is so strong, and the choice of music and the matching of sound to image, all that stuff is great. Obviously, Hopper deserves all the credit for coming up with that, but there was something self-destructive about him that just... Here we go: Directing, seven credits total. The Last Movie was technically released in '71, although apparently it wasn't completed until about a few years before his death. He has a film called Out of the Blue in 1980, Colors in '88. Do you remember Colors, the Sean Penn film? I always forget that's Hopper. I really liked that film. Robert Duvall?

NP: Yes, yes.

RM: He made a film in 1990 called Catchfire that he then sued to have his name taken off of, so it was released under Alan Smithee; and The Hot Spot the year after, and then a film called Chasers in '94, and then he was just done.

NP: That's a lot of movies for a lifetime. [Laughter]

RM: Yes. I guess it's not bad. But if you look at his acting credits he's got like, I think like a thousand…

NP: He's a great actor too, man. He was a wild man. So, as a director, it's like opinions. You can be the most opinionated motherfucker in the world if you're right.

RM: [Laughter] Right. And especially if you have a track record of being right.

NP: And then carte blanche, go ahead, go do whatever you want. And then the next movie, he did whatever he wanted, and then he couldn't do what he wanted anymore.

RM: Yes. They gave him a blank check and then they took the blank check back. So, tell me how Easy Rider, how did you choose it out of all those films I showed you on that list? Why'd you pick it, and has it influenced your own work?

NP: Why did I pick it? What else did I look at of the list? I guess Streetcar Named Desire, which is Brando. That's an amazing film. It was a good list. What else did I pick on that list? I can't remember, but it was a good list. I don't know why I picked Easy Rider. I guess it's just stuck with me. I love the freewheeling wildness of it. I love the ending even though the ending is - I forgot how sad the ending was.

RM: Yes. It's interesting because it's foreshadowed. In the scene in the diner about halfway through after they picked up Nicholson, and the cops were there, and that table full of girls, and the cops are talking about fucking with the guy and you can see there's sort of gleaming thing and they're calling them homosexuals and stuff and…

NP: "She looks pretty."

RM: Yes. [Laughter] And there's a sense that if they hadn't left, these guys would have – it would have been a serious problem.

NP: Well, they killed George. They said, "I bet you are not going to make the Parish line."

RM: That's right.

NP: And they didn't.

RM: There was a bunch of stuff after Nicholson enters the movie where I was like, "Why the…" Nicholson was... He wasn't a star then. He was in the movie because he had written Head, the Monkees movie, for Bert Schneider. He was known as a screenwriter and a pseudo intellectual. He's handsome, and he had shown up in several Roger Corman films, including the original Little Shop of Horrors, where he plays the masochist who ends up in the sadistic dentist's office. That was his very first role in cinema. So, Nicholson is hanging around Schneider's office. Hears about his friends, and they wrote him in, and it's interesting how the two characters take a backseat to him when he shows up. It's like Fonda and Hopper instinctively knew like "We've got a real star in our hands here," even though he was a nobody.

NP: Yes. And they fought. They fought to have him not in it and then they ate their words and said it was the best money that they spent. He steals the show. He really just steals the show.

RM: And his dialogue is amazing. It's so good.

NP: Because that's not what you're really expecting. You're not expecting someone like an ACLU - what kind of lawyer was he? He was ACLU?

RM: That's right. But he's also like a drunk [Laughter] He's in the drunk tank and like – and he's got this accent that I don't know what the hell - that was the thing. I was trying to piece the trip together geographically. I don't know exactly where they are, but I assume they're in Texas when they get pulled over for marching in the parade without a permit [Laughter] or whatever. Then Nicholson opens his mouth and out's coming this like, I don't know what southern accent that is, but it seems like it's like on the verge

of Foghorn Leghorn. It's very like Carolina, Georgia, upper class, maybe Savannah kind of.

NP: Exactly. I feel like it was a Savannah or Georgia or maybe even like a Mississippi type of person. But yes, he's not what you expect to meet in a small-town jail. An ACLU lawyer, like what are the chances? It's just like, just because they know him he does deliver the best lines out of the whole movie. He delivers the whole damn theme of the movie, talking about freedom, and like they're just scared of what you represent. They don't want freedom.

RM: Yes. They're afraid of it when they see it.

NP: They're afraid of it when they see it. I feel like that's like - it's a reverse western trail. They're going back. They made it to California and now they're coming all the way back. It's an Acid Western, right? Like, it is what it is. There's comparisons when they're shooing the horse and shooing the motorcycle, fixing that, like…

RM: Both in a barn.

NP: The names, Billy the Kid, Captain America, Wyatt after Wyatt Earp.

RM: Electric Horses.

NP: Yes, electric horses, exactly. The freedom of it really just goes with the time that is also I feel like thematic in it, because of everything ending and they were trying to make it to Mardi Gras on time. He throws away his watch. They talk about time with the guy, the hitchhiker that they picked up. They talk about time, like, this will be the right time to eat the acid, and then he's talking about, "We blew it."

RM: He says, "I'm hip to time, man."

NP: "I'm hip to time, man," yes, whatever that means.

RM: Yes, it's funny. It's as if time is an elemental force that he's somehow harnessed in his own imagination or something. [Laughter] Like some Doctor Strange level shit.

NP: Yes, yes.

RM: I love the whole theme of... The tagline of "Two men tried to find America and couldn't," I guess, is the punch line. There has been a very strong theme in the 21st century, culturally, about the end of America, like the fall of democracy, the collapse of the American empire and so forth. My personal history with New Orleans ties very strongly to that. This is the 14th city I've lived in.

NP: Wow.

RM: I grew up in Southern Connecticut, New Haven, which is a city of about 150,000. Big college town, obviously, but also like working class roots. I went to college in Boston, have lived all over New England, New York City, Upstate New York, and the West Coast. Plus visiting all these other cities all over the place. The cities are becoming homogenous to me, like there's very few places left in America that don't feel like

anywhere else. So, when I came to New Orleans after Katrina in 2006, I was not intending to necessarily stay here. One of my oldest friends was living in the Quarter and he had ridden out Katrina and invited me down to crash there. My mom had just passed away. I just sold my first feature film in Los Angeles. So, I had no big projects on my plate and I came down here and I found the post-Katrina grieving was very much on the same spiritual level as my own lostness and familial grieving.

So, there was a sense that, I felt like I was leaving America behind by being here. I still say to this day that the parts of New Orleans I like the least are the most American aspects, and I thought about selling bumper stickers that say, "Keep America out of New Orleans," or like "USA out of New Orleans", like it's an invading force, which I think in some ways it is. This is a city that's been occupied or owned by five different countries in its history, and there's something uniquely un-American about the place that really speaks to me. I should also mention, I'm an immigrant. I was born in Brazil and…

NP: Nice.

RM: I didn't become an American until I was six. So, I sort of…

NP: My family is from Chile.

RM: Oh. South Americans. [Laughter] I knew I could trust you.

NP: Yes. [Laughter] Yes, I agree.

RM: To put a period on my whole end-of-America idea, is that Easy Rider got there first. For a film created in '68 and released in '69, it's talking about the end of a culture and the loss of the ideals. Because ultimately, I define America by its ideals, not its geography or particular population. This was supposed to be a place where people could live diverse and could be peaceful and it could be free from governmental tyranny, but also, the tyranny of - I don't know, all the different kinds of tyranny, I guess. There's a kind of utopian vision behind the creating of it, and of course America, dropped the ball out of the gate pretty much as an ideal, but it's something to live up to. The idea is as long as we're working towards it, the ideal is alive. But then, the death of America is about the death of the interest in working towards that ideal. When people stop trying or when they corrupt the ideal to the point of like, "No, we're working towards this other ideal now" and it's whatever, then that's just not America anymore.

So, when they say, "We blew it," I feel like they're talking about Americans living up to what the concept of the country could have been. In 1969, I mean, that's a crazy, subversive idea, especially to be putting into a youth culture film where the youth were so instrumental in changing so many policies in the post-war era, going through the civil rights movement into Vietnam. You would think they would have been high on

this optimistic wave, they would have been high on their own supply in terms of power and their ability to change things. I mean, protesting was practically a social event back then. I think maybe it's the decadence how a righteous movement for equal rights got corrupted into a style and a bunch of vague New Age philosophy instead of actual political action. So, maybe that's what Easy Rider was…

NP: That's what Billy is. Billy is like the quintessential. He sounds like a hippie, doesn't he?

RM: Oh, yes.

NP: But he's all about capitalism.

RM: Yes, it's true.

NP: Like that's how he thinks. "We're rich, man. We're rich." That's the other, "We're rich." He still looks like a hippie, still sounds like a hippie, but he's been corrupted into just the whole capitalism aspect, which I think is what the opposite that Wyatt was talking about. When he stops everywhere, like to the farm, he's like, "Man, this is great. You should be proud of this." And then at the commune he's talking about like, "No, you're going to make it. You're going to make it." Still optimistic about living off the land and just being your own man and that is still the people clinging on to - it's interesting thinking about - between the commune and the old culture of the farmer. Because it's like the farmer married a Mexican lady, obviously. So, maybe it was in Texas. And they're over there trying to recapture like what they're doing at the commune. When he said, "We blew it, man." I feel like he's looking at Billy, and being like, "You're a capitalist. We did it for the money." You would think that it would be the other way around by the way that they looked. Peter Fonda with the nice glasses and then American gas tank and stuff.

RM: Maybe metaphorically or allegorically, they represent Fonda as the pure dream of America and then Hopper is the ugly reality of America.

NP: Yes. If you thought anyone would be a capitalist, it would be Peter Fonda in that right? He looks more like a capitalist than Billy the Kid does, but he's focused on getting to Mardi Gras so "We could get laid and spend this money". That's also like, "But is that American?"

RM: He's got the business card for a hooker, [Laughter] which I thought was like "Hookers have business cards?" It's interesting.

NP: Yes. And when they spend his money, George's money on it and go to the hooker, to the cat house.

RM: Right? Corner of Bourbon and Toulouse.

NP: That's the end of it, man. That's the end of the era, bro. The free love, it's not free love anymore. They're paying for the love, they're paying for the companionship. That's the end of the era right there, man.

RM: Yes. They show up in New Orleans as tourists. They hit Mardi Gras like a bunch of tourists would. It's funny because I wondered how much of that was deliberate or intentional because Mardi Gras is so misunderstood by people, not New Orleans people who don't realize it's more of a season. To miss Mardi Gras, it's not like missing the Fourth of July or something. There's a bunch of dialogue early in the movie where they're talking about, "Oh, we got to get there, man," like Hopper is freaking out about how much time they have and he's like, "We'll be there in a few days. Chill out, bro." I kept thinking like, I don't know if he knows what Mardi Gras really is. It seems very strange that he would be thinking like, "Oh, we got to get there on this one particular day" or something when it's a month-long event.

NP: Yes. That's what America is though. Like their journey to the unknown, but they're going to go there anyway. It's like idealized version of it, but it's when you get there, you realize that it's not really the way it is. Did Wyatt have a good time there?

RM: No. [Laughter]

NP: No, he did not.

RM: To say the least.

NP: Everything was wrong for him and everything was right for Billy. He just ignored it and that's why I think Wyatt was so pissed at it.

RM: Yes, it makes sense.

NP: The original ending was they were going to sail away on a boat in the Keys.

RM: No kidding.

NP: That was the original ending and Terry Southern was like, "No, you can't do that," and Dennis Hooper was like, "No fucking way. They got to have a good ending." And then he realized that it was the right ending, the somber ending of the era being dead now as it gets covered up with the American flag.

RM: Yes, that final helicopter shot is unbelievable. I remember the first time I watched it and when they run into the hillbillies or whoever the guys with the guns in the truck, I thought, "Oh, boy. This is the third set of hillbillies [Laughter] or reactionary southerners they've run into." I wonder about…

NP: They didn't spend any money the whole trip if you think about it and they also didn't help anybody. They saw those people starving like that one amazing shot of just the circling of the room. That was a minute-shot of 40 people or something, which was so awesome.

RM: Oh, yes, all those faces.

NP: Yes, all those faces.

RM: Amazing faces.

NP: They had all this money and they never helped.

RM: I'm thinking about that. The commune doesn't need money hypothetically because they're self-sufficient and that's what Peter Fonda admires so much about them.

NP: Well, they're trying because the crop didn't come in last year so now they're almost starving over there.

RM: That's true and then Fonda tells him like, "You're going to be okay, man. You're going to get through it."

NP: Yes, "you're going to be okay, man." That's the most American thing to do. [Laughter] You got a bunch of money to help these people out and you're like, "No, man. Thoughts and prayers."

RM: Thoughts and prayers. Yes, exactly. I was just going to say that because that's part of the impotency of this new age, hippie spiritual movement like, "Good vibes, man. It's all it takes. Positive thinking" or whatever.

NP: It's all it takes.

RM: It's funny how quickly that got corrupted in the 70s into Scientology and Est, and all these religious cults for rich people peddling the same vaguely positive spiritualism. It's interesting to see all the different lineages that Easy Rider created and reflected upon. I love the motorcycle as a horse thing because it ties back to what Western movies meant to America's self-image. The Western, for most of the century, had been the dominant form of America telling fables about itself to itself. The big gilded mirror that America held up culturally to tell itself good things and to feel better. It's all positive reaffirmation. John Wayne cleaning up the West and Manifest Destiny and all that shit that we know is so toxic now.

NP: Yes, taming everything.

RM: Right, "seizing the land from the savages."

NP: Yes.

RM: The first thing I noticed about Easy Rider is the incredible, I guess you'd call it extras casting. The faces of the Mexicans in that opening scene: the lack of teeth, the wonderful textures of their skin, the expressiveness of their eyes throughout the movie. Hopper or Kovács or whoever was pointing the camera at, obviously, real people who happen to be in these environments. So, you end up with this really amazingly multicultural view of America over the course of the film. It's the best part of the film I think.

NP: Well, he loved the European films and who did that better than Fellini? The people in Fellini's films, those faces. I love their face and he'll like, "Okay, this shot has nothing to do with their film. Let's just watch their face." I feel like that came from there and seeing the sun-worn wrinkles on the cowboy faces and stuff, that's the texture of America. Seeing him married to a Mexican lady with all these multicultural children

running around is the America that you don't really see and I'm sure you didn't see it then even as much. *[00:40:00]*

RM: Well, paradoxically, back in the 60s, I'm sure there's far less representation of that, but it was probably far more common because it was before the corporate takeover and the deregulation of public lands and so forth. That's part of the homogenization of America I was referring to earlier, the sameness of places is because everyone's consuming the same media and watching the same thing. Everyone sleeps in a mud mask and buys on Amazon.com and it's just creating the same kind of people everywhere. You might get some accent flares or whatever, but you really don't have the diversity anymore or at least in the urban sense where you go to a city and it'd be a completely different way of life. Now, everyone's got the same way of life. It's just very frustrating. I don't know.

The question of how do you resist it, I just gave up and fled. Now, I question it because of the political moment of the time... We're recording this on June 11th, 2020. Revolution's in the air again. When I was talking to Harry Shearer and Glen Pitre who are both men in their 60s, they were talking about how the air feels like '67, '68, '69 now culturally, which is frankly, exciting to me. To me I think that's a great thing because I think we've been so complacent for so long as a culture. This should have happened 25 years ago, all this, but we watched Friends instead.

NP: It's a teeter-totter, man. Do you know what I'm saying? It takes the movement of back and forth until it really tips. It's like water sloshing in a bucket. Now, we're ready to tip the bucket again. We've been distracted. That's the whole thing. We're distracted with how easy things are for some people now, so they don't want shit to change. Nothing's wrong in their life. Why do they want to change? Why did they want to give up power? That's not going to happen. You have to take it.

RM: Exactly. You have to take it because they're not going to give it up without a fight.

NP: Yes. They're not going to give it up without a fight.

RM: Precisely.

NP: That's what this movie is about, man.

RM: Yes, bingo. Exactly.

NP: They just failed. They failed to take it, man. They got distracted.

RM: Exactly. They chased the easy money and the good times.

NP: Yes.

RM: Let's talk about how the film affects your filmmaking as a creative person. You're talking very long lenses. You like long lenses. Is Kovács one of your cinematography heroes? Where does he stand in the pantheon for you?

NP: I guess I'm a fan of the European movies: Antonioni, Fellini, Truffaut, Godard, all those... Agnès. I guess that's how I started filmmaking. Just go do it. Now is the time, just go do it. So, I did it, and I didn't know anything about it. It sucked. My shoot was shaky. My shoot was out of focus. [Laughter] Then you keep doing it and doing it and doing it, and you get better. You learn more and you take it on as a craft. The energy of it and the go-and-fucking-do-it, that really influenced my filmmaking more than anything. Why not? Why not me? Why can't I do it? These people shook it up and did it their way and they changed the world and film.

RM: Like Mark Duplass said at South By [Southwest] five years ago or whatever, "The cavalry is not coming. Do it yourself."

NP: Yes, they're not coming until you can show them that you can do it yourself and then they'll be like, "Okay. Well, can you do it with people?" I'm like, "Well, I don't know any people." [Laughter]" Well, I guess you got to find people and then come back to me."

RM: Yes, it's funny. I think your use of musicians is really clever and I've decided that's one of the ways I'm going to be moving forward with my next feature is employing more local musicians in actor roles and incorporating music as a larger piece of the narrative. [dog coughs] Can you hear my dog in the background?

NP: Nice. Spit it out, baby. Spit it out.

RM: This is Mr. Speedy.

NP: Hey, buddy.

RM: That's Edgar sleeping back there.

NP: What a cutie.

RM: Speedy's the fat one waddling around.

NP: [Laughter] I use musicians because that's who I knew. That's who my friends were. Derrick Freeman, he’s in pretty much every single one of my things because he was the best man at my wedding. He's a good friend. We produce music together; we play music together and then why not do another venture? I use what I had around me, which were my friends because when you're trying to start out, you can't get people to work with you until you can show them something that you can do.

RM: Right.

NP: I couldn't get anyone to direct for me because they didn't see the vision that I had, so I ended up directing. I couldn't get anyone to shoot it because they didn't see the vision that I had, so I ended up shooting it. Same thing with writing and same thing with casting and actors. I didn't know any actors. I knew musicians and I know that they're fools, [Laughter] and I know that we can have fun and we can make something. There's something innately musical about film and you can't really separate music from it. Even before there was dialogue, there was music.

RM: Absolutely. Rhythms, tempos - yes, it's so true.

NP: Yes, the rhythm of dialogue. The good stuff has the biggest musicality of it. I feel my films are so rhythmic because that's what I've done for so long. When I cut too the final thing is all about timing.

RM: It's all about timing, everything. Film is such an interesting medium because it incorporates all the other media.

NP: Yes, it does.

RM: You can put literally every other art form into the film. It's amazing how it lives and breathes with musical rhythms, which can be then shaped. You can put rhythms on the page. You can put rhythms in the performances. You can put rhythms in post, in editing and you can add music to create literal rhythms to go on top of all these other rhythms that have been established. It sounds like hip hop in a way, a sneakily perfect background to move into the art form.

NP: Well, it is because hip hop is built on other music, originally. Do you know what I'm saying? What good films do is they build on the language of film and hip hop builds on the language of music by just sampling it at first, just literally taking it, and mixing and mashing. That's what film is. Film is you take all the things that you love about other films and other directors, and stuff and you put it into your own thing. You build on the language and hopefully, you can interject something useful that people will then build on itself. Rhythm, film is pacing. It's all pacing. The script will tell you "Oh, this doesn't seem like it's paced right," because you can literally read the whole script, 90 to 110 pages and feel if it's in the right rhythm that will translate. Music is a language that everyone understands.

RM: Interesting. Great way to segue into my next question for you, which is, you told me you're working on a feature right now. What can you tell us about this new project?

NP: Yes, I've been working on this feature. I was hired to adapt a book by a prisoner who escaped jail. It's been about a year and a half process, so we're finally moving into pre-production. The book is great. It's very interesting adapting something.

RM: Where is it set?

NP: It is set in Alton Prison in Missouri. That's where he escaped from. This dude, Quawntay Adams, they did a National Geographic special on him as the escapist and stuff. A friend, a producer, that I know in LA gave me - he's like, "What do you think? Do you think you could do something?" I read the book and he's like, "Good because we have two weeks." So, it turned into an outline and everyone agreed, and I started talking to the actual prisoner who's still in jail, Quawntay. We talk all the time. He's a great dude. His dad was one of the first Crips in Compton so he was born into that life, but I guarantee if he wasn't, he would be something way different. He's an amazing person

and it's been a really interesting journey telling his story. When you adapt something, it's a 400-page book and you can't include all of that stuff. You have to consolidate characters and take leaps and take other characters...

RM: Merge them.

NP: Yes. Consolidate the characters, but also figure out who the other characters are that are in his book. You don't see them because the book is from his perspective, so you don't really know exactly what the people really are. You got to take leaps of faith and infer, and use your craft as a screenwriter to make it. I was so happy when he called me up almost crying about how much he enjoyed this fucking script because I did have to take those leaps and do it. It's his story.

RM: That's amazing.

NP: He's in jail for trying to smuggle marijuana, by the way. At a time where there's marijuana billionaires, he got 30 years in 2005. It's been 15 years and he's still got 15 years left. The whole story is about him trying to escape to be at the birth of his daughter, which he found out was going to happen as soon as he landed in jail. So, now she's 15. *[00:50:00]*

RM: Amazing. It's tragic. So, this story was brought to you by those producers?

NP: Mmm-hmm.

RM: You're hired to both write and direct it?

NP: Yes.

RM: That's fantastic. How did you meet the producers?

NP: I don't know. Just random LA meetings through one of my friends, Lizzy Moriarta. She's a graphic designer. She does titles for films and stuff, and she's like, "You got to meet these people," so as you do in LA, over some Mexican margaritas. He's like, "I saw The Funeral Band", read a bunch of stuff that I wrote and a couple of weeks later, he's like, "I think I have something for you. Would you be interested? "

RM: Have you written feature-length spec scripts before?

NP: Yeah.

RM: Cool. So, you have a drawer full of writing samples?

NP: I probably wouldn't have taken it on if I didn't, no. [Laughter]

RM: I'm asking these questions for listeners who might be at the stage where they've got short films they've produced and are looking to go into a feature-length debut. The one thing that people never seem to do, but I always tell them is vital is you got to write feature-length material. Even if those scripts don't get made, you need to be thinking about a canvas that size. Like you said, all the rhythms that you need to sustain an audience's interest for two hours and it's not like writing a short. It's a different animal

entirely, especially on the page. So, I think it can be exhibit Z for the importance of writing spec scripts.

NP: Yes, I started writing webisodes and web series because they're short. That was a nice medium and then we did British Quarter Hustler, which was a fun little web series. I did a bunch of short films, wrote a bunch of 30-minute pilots and then started. I feel I had enough crafts in me already after the years of doing that that I could start taking on a feature-length film because it's hard. It's not an easy thing to do to sit there and write a hundred pages. It takes a lot of time. I'm very into outlining and note-carding.

RM: Same here.

NP: It is a hard task to do, but it's not impossible. You need craft to support it.

RM: Exactly.

NP: Everyone has an idea. It's like, "Okay, cool." An idea is just an idea. An idea is worthless. How can you argue it on the page? What are you trying to say? What characters are going to be on each side of that argument so you're not just out there saying it, and you can just bury it in subtext and have these characters argue your point?

RM: Yes, that's a great way of looking at it. Craig Mazin has a similar theory. Do you know Craig Mazin?

NP: Of course, Scriptnotes.

RM: He's got that whole thesis-antithesis model that he likes to use.

NP: Yes, and-but, but-and, and-but, and-but, and-but. [Laughter] This happens and this happens, but this happens. Then, this happens and this happens, but this happens. That's all a film. Those are your pinch points.

RM: Yes, it's funny. South Park's Writing Room uses the "so/but" model, which is like somebody has a goal, so they do this, but this happens. So, they do that…

NP: But this happens.

RM: It's amazing how such a simple premise can suddenly unlock the dramatic engine of a story especially when you're adapting a true story. Real-life doesn't necessarily follow dramatic continuity or thematic unity or anything. So I've heard from my documentary friends and from people who've done similar adaptations that part of unlocking true stories or autobiographies is finding that theme and those sides of the argument and using that theme to be your litmus test for what remains in and what doesn't.

NP: Yes, your spine. The spine of your film because you can go off in so many tangents. When there's a blank page, it's infinite possibilities. Being able to stay on that line, on your spine, is the hardest thing about writing because some stuff that you want to put in doesn't and you got to cut it. If it doesn't support your theme and what you're trying to say, you have to cut it and that comes down to making great characters, and

designing their wounds and their wants and their needs to be conflicting so that they can overcome them and learn the theme that you're trying to push in the first [thing]. We're theme pushers.

RM: Exactly. What are you trying to say with it.

NP: How do I feel after I write it? How do I feel after I read it? If someone's like, "I don't know how I should feel at the end of this," that's not good. [Laughter]

RM: That's a warning sign. So, tell me about your experience with the New Orleans film community. It sounds like you've been going out to Los Angeles for a while. How long have you been doing that and tell me what motivated the decision to go bicoastal I guess?

NP: I don't know. I think I've been going out there regularly for maybe three years now. Last year, I was out there eight or nine times for various things. I love New Orleans, but the business is there and that's the truth about it. They're not hiring any above-the-line people from New Orleans. You got to go through LA.

RM: Yes.

NP: I like LA, man. People give it a lot of shit, but it’s nice weather, good food. [Laughter]

RM: I love LA. I lived there for almost 10 years, '98 to '06, essentially. It's a very underrated city because all everyone knows about it are the crappy Hollywood aspects. They don't realize what an incredible melting pot it is and how good the quality of life is and stuff.

NP: Yes, you can go out and do a little hiking. You're right there in the beauty of California. All people talk about is being in their cars when they talk about LA, it’s the traffic. Sometimes it takes me 40 minutes to get from here uptown. [Laughter] That's three miles.

RM: New Orleans is by far the worst driving city I've ever lived in. [Laughter] I've lived in New York, Boston, and LA. The driving in New Orleans is nightmarish on all possible levels. The Funeral Band is so New Orleans-y. It's using all of these well-known tropes of the city's culture. Do you see telling more New Orleans stories in your future as you become a feature director and so on, and if so, do you see yourself as part of any kind of New Orleans storytelling tradition as an artist?

NP: Well, that's not really for me to decide, I guess. The people elect you if you're a New Orleans tradition. I would never say that I was. I love the city and I love telling the stories about the people that I know around here but as a writer, you got to tell all types of stories from all types of people. I hope I can tell more New Orleans stories. There are a million New Orleans stories that you can tell. It's a great city for material because there is the beautiful vibrance of it, but there's also the heartbreaking aspect of it, which is as somebody who does dramedy, it's like the best dramedy city you can get [Laughter] because it is beautiful but it is heartbreaking. It will break your heart.

RM: It's the tragicomedy capital. [Laughter]

NP: It really is. Lately, I've written a couple of New Orleans features. The Funeral Band is actually the first 10 minutes of a pilot for the series.

RM: Nice. I can totally see that.

NP: But I also write stuff about New Jersey. I have another pilot called Brown Gringo about growing up as a Latino amongst anything but Latinos. I just wrote another feature about my sister about moving from Newark, which is the hood to the suburbs. She's my half-sister, so interacting with my dad as her stepdad as an immigrant coming into this country and that relationship…

RM: The Fresh Prince of Jersey City.

NP: There's literally a Fresh Prince remark in it.

RM: [Laughter]. Nailed it.

NP: Yes, I do see myself telling more New Orleans stories because I've been here for 20 years and it's what I know, and it's full of the people I love, but also I want to tell stories about people of color who don't really get much attention. As Latinos, we don't get much attention, to be honest. They want us to be homeboys or helpers, but there's a whole other generation of us, especially first-generation Latinos who are just we're Americans. We're caught between being not Latino enough for Latinos and not being white enough for America. Those are the stories that I want to tell.

RM: Yes, it's interesting. Brazil is a totally bizarre place and it's like people just forget it exists. Doesn't speak Spanish so it's not Hispanic. [Laughter] It's a total anomaly in Latin culture.

NP: But you're Latino.

RM: Yes.

NP: I feel Brazil is like why there's Latino. It's like "Well, everyone else is Hispanic, but what about Brazil?" Oh, we need another word for that. Okay. [Laughter]

RM: Yes, great point. [Laughter] *[01:00:00]*

NP: It's like the asterisk.

RM: "Oh those guys."

NP: What about Brazil? Oh, shit.

RM: Cool, man. Well, this is all very inspiring. Glad to see somebody really making moves out there. I'm trying to think of a strong closing question. The idea of Mardi Gras is the biggest representation of New Orleans culture. It always has rubbed me a little bit the wrong way, but I also have a particular attitude about Mardi Gras, which is that I don't really love it. I didn't even really know about it when I moved here and I moved here for reasons totally unrelated to it. So, when it happened in my first year in '07, I was just taken aback by the tourism and how it shuts the whole city down. As I delved into

the history of New Orleans movies, I started seeing - you can just see how that's just an easy cliché, such a trope that bad films that don't really care about New Orleans just go to as their [default thing.

As a cultural practice, for me, it's very redundant with life here. My only real complaint about it is that it's redundant and I don't know why it means so much to locals. You can do any of that stuff any day of the year, parading, putting a funny hat on and wearing a costume or whatever. You can find any excuse to do all of that year-round. The city is so laissez-faire and creative and permissive and stuff that there's nothing stopping you. So, when Easy Rider, when they end up in Mardi Gras and stuff, the view of it is that this is a final collapse and this is where Captain America realizes that the dream has been pissed away. Could they have used New Orleans better or was Mardi Gras the perfect choice for that?

NP: I think if you know what Mardi Gras is really, I think it is the perfect choice because it represented these American ideals to them, I think, the freedom that they've been looking for the whole time, but once they got here, it wasn't really like that, which I feel they saw the dark side of Mardi Gras, which there is the dark side of Mardi Gras, which is the tourist side. I really do think it's one of the best representations of Mardi Gras because they were really honest with it. It's a good time if you pay for it. They paid these ladies to go out. They had bad trips in the cemetery. The dark side of it, the dark side of the dream. So, I really do think it was one of the best movies to represent Mardi Gras in that way because it represented it unabashedly. The good and the bad of America represented with Mardi Gras because that's what happens when you get your freedom.

RM: Yes, that's totally right.

NP: With freedom comes responsibility.

RM: I have a friend who says you know it's Mardi Gras when somebody is crying outside of a bar.

NP: That's Tuesday, man. It's Tuesday in New Orleans. [Laughter] Yes and then someone pukes on her.

RM: Exactly and then trips over their own costume.

NP: Yes, [Laughter] you know it. It's not a New Orleans movie, but it is a New Orleans movie because this was their goal. Their goal was the freedom that Mardi Gras represents for them... Bacchus...

RM: The bacchanal, yes.

NP: The bacchanal.

RM: Cool. Well, you're going to post about your adventures in LA and do you have a start date on this feature yet?

NP: Yes, the title is "Bosco."

RM: Like the chocolate sauce?

NP: Yes, that's what his mother called him. She's a really nice lady too. Talked to her through emails and stuff. It's been a really interesting way to get to know somebody by being the person telling their story. We got a great cast. I can't really say anything about that yet until it's official, but hopefully, we'll be shooting in September barring what's going on with all this COVID stuff because we got to keep it safe. It's a pretty good movie to do in something like that because he is in solitary confinement most of the time. So, there are ways that we can get around it. When he gets roughed up by the people, they're wearing riot gear.

RM: [Laughter] It's perfect.

NP: You know how it is. You just wait. You sit there, I'm doing pre-production stuff, working with the production designer who I worked with on another feature out there with this company. I got my shot list together and just sitting here getting ready for it. That's what you got to do. You got to be prepared for the opportunity, right?

RM: Right and just might be a blessing in disguise in that it's extending your pre-pro, right?

NP: Yes, but you know how it is. Once we get the news, it's going to be like, "Okay, we're shooting in two weeks."

RM: [Laughter] Right. You must be waiting on... SAG and insurance I think are the last two barriers to production.

NP: It's insurance. I've been talking to a lot of other people who are pretty much in my position, making the first or second indie film here and trying to do it, and insurance has been the real barrier. We got to see how that shakes out because insurance runs the world.

RM: Yes, no joke.

NP: This podcast is sponsored by insurance. [Laughter] They can't cover you. They'll say they will.

RM: I like the generic products in Repo Man. Just “insurance,” trademark.

NP: You need it. It's not going to cover anything.

RM: Cool. I love The Funeral Band and I think that would make a fantastic series. Any progress with that.

NP: I just attached another producer who's a director. He does Vampire Diaries, All Americans and stuff like that, a lot of stuff with Julie Plec.

RM: Dumb question, are those TV shows?

NP: Oh, those are TV shows. Yes. Hopefully, that pans out too. I just got a lot of projects: Brown Gringo, John and The Funeral Band is what the series is called and another New Orleans feature about rappers.

RM: Oh, awesome.

NP: Got to stockpile the material because you never know when it's going to hit and when it's going to become zeitgeisty, I guess you can say.

RM: Yes, exactly. I have a friend whose motto is ABW, Always Be Working.

NP: I'm in holding patterns. It's just when you do these big features and stuff, it takes so long. I get so itchy to shoot something. It helps doing the commercial work a lot, but still, I'm just like - I know how hard it is. It takes just as much time prepping a short film and like writing a short film. So, I'm like am I going to spend all this time because short films are almost harder because you got to get all the story into 10 minutes.

RM: This is exactly why I make so few short films because I would rather put all that energy into a feature. It's almost as much work…

NP: And you can't sell [a short film].

RM: I guess it depends on your process.

NP: If you have a good process it's a lot of work.

RM: All right, final question. I promise. You've also directed and acted under an alias. Is that something you can talk about or are you trying to keep that on the DL?

NP: No, that was my stage name, Jermaine Quiz and again, I acted because I didn't know any actors. [Laughter] I was like, "Okay, sure. Let me just helm this. Let me just direct and act. I've never done anything before like this. So, let me just do it anyway and see how it comes out." I do get offers to be in people's short films and stuff and I just – I don't know. Acting's hard, man.

RM: It is. I don't know how they do it. [Laughter]

NP: Acting is so hard. I've done improv and stuff too before, improv classes.

RM: You had to do that British accent the whole time.

NP: That's even hard, ain't it.

RM: For people at home, we're talking about the British Quarter Hustler's web series that he did.

NP: Yes, British Quarter Hustler is basically about the warring street performers in the French Quarter against the lesser-known British Quarter. It's really only a block so it's more like a British 16th. It's not really a quarter.

RM: A metric 16th? [Laughter]

NP: Yes, exactly.

RM: I like that the French guys are dressed like mimes, so you have human statue versus mime culture. [Laughter] It's just such a natural comic premise.

NP: Yes, I got the idea by seeing two of the statues yelling at each other. Two dudes painted in…

RM: Gold and silver.

NP: Spray-painted in gold and silver yelling at each other. I'm like, "Oh, man. They have real beef." I wonder what a standoff would be like. [Laughter] It's uneventful, but it's very funny.

RM: Those guys have big personalities. I spend so much time in Lower Decatur, you see them walking back from Jackson Square. Sometimes they'll be in a mood. Sometimes they'll be hollering at people.

NP: They're always in a mood.

RM: I got a character in a movie coming up who's got knuckle tattoos that say "loud mime". [Laughter] I'll give you that as a gift. You can work that, if you want, into a future British Quarter Hustler's episode.

NP: Nice. I would love to make more of those. Those were just super fun, just silly like the Asians of Lee Circle. [Laughter] From being in bands and stuff, I'm sick of pushing brands. It's so hard. It just takes so much time to build the brand. So, I just went with a personal brand right now.

RM: I think that's the smart way because it's such a creative energy suck to spend all your time on social media and make a hash tag out of your own identity. People will tell you it's the future, but I think it's a distraction to artists.

NP: We're at the connection of commerce and art, and that's the way it is. That's the way it always was going to be for us. Art is a commodity how much you like it or not. It's what you do with that information that's true. That's your journey. You're never going to get rid of it, but if you're lucky enough, you won't have to do that much.

RM: It's like that old expression. “They don't call it show-show. It's show business.” *[01:10:00]*

NP: Exactly. It's show business. They don't call it show-show. It's show business. [Laughter] Fo' sho.

RM: It's great seeing somebody out there making all the moves and best of luck with Bosco. It's exciting to see more features made by New Orleans artists. That's what I'm all about and I hope people listening to this, go and check out Easy Rider, which is available everywhere, on all the streaming platforms. Is it a Criterion title?

NP: Yes, it’s a Criterion title.

RM: Absolutely worth checking out for people who haven't seen it. It's one of those movies that just changed everything. Filmmaking was not the same after it.

NP: It was not.

RM: It birthed the American New Wave. Cool. Well, thank you, Nick. I appreciate your time, man.

NP: Thanks, Randy. It was great talking to you. I'm looking forward to seeing what you're going to be working on next too and let's just keep it moving, bro.

RM: Yes, exactly. I'm available to you for whatever you need just in future projects or a sounding board, read a script. I'll show up on set and hold a boom mic. I don't care. I love making movies and I want to help.

NP: Nice, nice, nice. Yes, yes, yes. Well, I appreciate it, man. Thank you so much for having me.

RM: Subscribe, rate, review, tell your friends, et cetera.

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