



One Stop Doc Shop

Episode 3 – Lindsey Dryden



Introduction

(Intro music starts – cinema film reel whirring, and countdown beeps)

Hello and welcome to One Stop Doc Shop, a podcast that celebrates and encourages diversity in non-fiction filmmaking. In each episode, a guest filmmaker will share their secrets on how to make award-winning documentaries.

I'm your host Angela Clarke and this series was made possible with the support of Screen Alliance Wales, Ffilm Cymru Wales and BFI Network funding from the National Lottery.

My guest today is the multi-award winning producer and director Lindsey Dryden. Her producer credits include the Sundance Special Jury Award winning feature documentary *Unrest*, which was also made the Oscar shortlist - and the Emmy award winning series - *Trans in America*.

In addition, Lindsey has also gathered a host of directing accolades for her feature documentary *Lost and Sound*, as well as her portfolio of short form films.

A proud founding member of both the Queer Producers Network and FWD-Doc (*pronounced Forward Doc*), Lindsey is interested in telling stories that explore unconventional experiences of the body.

We discuss the logistics of working across multiple international projects, how to ensure inclusivity throughout the filmmaking process, as well as the magic of working out the right time to tell your story.

We also chat about the importance of serving non-dominant audiences and the value of developing bespoke distribution strategies.

I hope you enjoy listening...

If you want to watch Lindsey's award-winning films or read more about her work, click [here](#).

Angela Clarke - Hello Lindsey, welcome and thank you for coming on to the One Stop Doc Shop.

Lindsey Dryden - Thank you for having me...

Angela Clarke - Well it's probably accurate to say there isn't a film making role you haven't undertaken in the last few years, because as well as originating, producing and directing your own projects, you also produce, impact produce exec produce on other projects too, so you're like a one stop filmmaking shop yourself! When do you get to sleep? *(laughs)*

Lindsey Dryden - Actually I think that is an important question for lots of people at the moment, *(laughs)* trying to do lots of things and trying to do that sustainably and actually it's taken you and me a while to schedule this conversation because I'm sort of working at capacity all of the time so I'm glad we have managed to pin down the time to have a chat. I think we all have to keep talking about how do we make it sustainable, and how do we make it sustainable for our teams and those are things I think about a lot...

Angela Clarke - Yeh, there is a lot to go into today, as you have such a breadth of experience across the board. But before we talk in detail about the kind of films you've worked on, I wanted to ask you just to begin with, where did it start for you? When did you know that film was what you wanted to do?

Lindsey Dryden - It sort of started out as an experiment honestly. *(Smiling)* I knew I wanted to be in storytelling and I didn't know what kind, and at that point I had not considered at all that film was the most expensive form of storytelling you could hope to get involved in, and that is something I've learned lots of lessons about ever since *(laughs)*.

My sister and I, our childhoods were made up of storytelling and creating worlds and that was what I wanted to do for my life and so my first jobs sort of out of school and university, although I worked part time all the way through all of those times, was working on whale watching boats in the Canary Islands as a whale and dolphin researcher and guide.

I'm not good at science, *(laughs)* but I'm good at outdoors and with people and so I thought I might want to do wildlife filmmaking and then I realised the problem with wildlife filming is it is not about people. I realised that the stories that are told around wildlife filmmaking don't come from the voice of the individuals involved and that is what I'm most sort of interested in, you know is people's authentic voices.

So I started out in TV and you know I don't come from an economically well-supported background. I don't come from a wealthy background, so I knew I had a limited amount of time that I could commit for free and I did. I approached lots of production companies and I said I can do two weeks worth of work experience for free and after that I would need to get paid. And so I got my first job working

on some history series which were a lot of fun, and then I got to work with a brilliant production company in Brighton called Lambent whose values really sort of spoke to me and still do.

Lambent Productions imbued its work and its ethos with values that I really appreciated. They are an ethical company, and they're thoughtful about the voices, and which stories they want to tell and who tells them. And then I worked some more in TV and didn't enjoy the sort of lack of ethical autonomy and or creative autonomy and honestly I also didn't enjoy working 80 hour weeks where people assumed stamina equals talent or stamina equals skill and I don't think that is the case. I actually don't think that people should be working 80-hour weeks in television because your contract says you should do the job until the job is done.

I didn't recognise that I would need to do the same amount of work in film in an independent sense to make anything happen (*laughs*) and to make things work, but (*pauses*) I really value the autonomy that I have and so I wish before I had left TV that I had thought more carefully about the economic models of TV and film. In TV I was paid a salary by someone else and in film obviously that is not the case if you are an independent filmmaker. You are pulling together funds on a sort of a project-by-project basis and it's really, really tough. So part of me wishes I had saved a lot of money before I had left TV to cushion that fall, but seeking that autonomy has been incredible and watching the continued values enacted in a lot of broadcast television – the bullying, the ableism, I'm not sorry that I left...

Angela Clarke - It can be, it can be a challenging world I think and unfortunately because it is such a hugely oversubscribed industry....

Lindsey Dryden – Mmm.

Angela Clarke – I did the same I'm not from a background that is economically wealthy and I also did work experience to get into TV. TV is certainly a challenging industry, but you are right film in that same respect is difficult to earn a living and nobody gets rich in films do they? (*laughs*)

Lindsey Dryden – (*laughs*)

Angela Clarke - Despite the dreams we have...(*laughs*)

Lindsey Dryden – Very few people definitely do...(*laughs*)

Angela Clarke – Yeh that is true. So post TV then – 2009, you made your first independent short ***Close Your Eyes and Look at Me***. And so for anyone that hasn't seen it, could you maybe just give us a little brief of what the project was about and maybe what attracted you to it?

Lindsey Dryden - Mmm yeh, so *Close Your Eyes and Look at Me* came about because I was developing a few stories with young British feminists about their kind of surprising approach to their identity and their values. And I worked with a young woman in Scotland called Shabana who would describe her wearing of the hijab as an act of empowerment for her as a woman.

At the time that really wasn't the kind of narrative that we were hearing in the press, particularly the very toxic British press and so she was just a character whose perspective I was really, really interested in. She was also a quiet voice, she wasn't the sort of obvious choice necessarily and I'm really interested in those quiet voices, those who don't always get the opportunity to be heard and actually who isn't that interested in being heard (*laughs*) and you know she was a wonderful person to work with and so that is where that came from...

Angela Clarke - And so tell us a little bit about the story itself, what was it that you thought was so engaging about Shabana herself? Maybe can you also tell us a little bit how you filmed it, and about the style in which you filmed it?

Lindsey Dryden - I would say that it was a very experimental act. You know I didn't go to film school, I didn't learn the sort of theory and form of film in the way that lots of people do. And so my own forays into directing at the start were based on my instincts and based on what I had learnt from television and wanting to do something different. So it's an extremely simple proposition - we simply follow her (*Shabana*) through the streets over a period of time as if it is leading towards an act of revelation, which it doesn't.

So it is a very simply little film and you know I'm really grateful to her and the other folks I was exploring ideas with at the time. You know I didn't approach her and say I'm a wonderfully experienced, perfectly talented, ready-made director and I know what I'm doing here. I was able to approach her and say I want to try something with you, and if you're interested lets do that sort of delicately and carefully. But yes it was an experiment in lots of ways and was the first film of mine that sort of went on to a major film festival and that sort of opened up a new world for me of how independent cinema works, and the community that you can find in independent cinema....

Angela Clarke - What was the duration of that film again, it was quite short wasn't it - 6 mins or something?

Lindsey Dryden - Can't remember yes 6 mins I think.

Angela Clarke - And so what did you learn most through the process of making that first film?

Lindsey Dryden - Mmm I think I (*pauses*) that is a really good question. I learnt a lot about seeing what happened and being gentle. I also learnt a lot about how I would plan a visual strategy next time for example. The visual strategy -there wasn't one...

Angela Clarke – Mmmm.

Lindsey Dryden – I didn't know how to do that at that point. Honestly I didn't know how to think visually in any level of detail and I learned how important that was and how much I wanted to focus on that going forward. And the best part of it in many ways, alongside getting to work with Shebana and her family, was the editing process.

I had the most amazing kind of collaboration with an editor called Laura Seymour based in Brighton, and it was such a brilliant act of sort of immersion in storytelling, to do that together. We certainly didn't have a lot of time and we didn't have any money, but it was such a pleasure to be part of that kind of editing relationship and I also had a really productive time. I still think about the fact that somehow I managed to manage my time as a director, doing other projects, and earning money in other ways at that moment in a way I've never manage to replicate since (*laughs*) and there was a sort of a peace and a calm in making that film that I really enjoyed...

Angela Clarke - I think that comes from when you just jump in at the deep end and then you don't have to take all the other big things into consideration and so sometimes that ignorance is bliss isn't it?

Lindsey Dryden – Definitely.

Angela Clarke - How did you raise the funds for that first film, did you get funding from somewhere or did you crowd-fund or did you just fly by the seat of your pants?

Lindsey Dryden – So I had left TV at that point, and I had taken a bit of time away because I was really burnt out and unwell from working in TV. So I took some time off, and I had a little bit of money, so I paid the editor and I paid the cinematography and paid the sound person for the music. The music was beautiful and in fact I actually think that the musician donated that music because it was a no budget project, and that isn't something that I ask people to ever do ever now. But it was a very, very, very small budget and I was lucky enough to have a couple of thousand pounds I'd say to have to make that happen.

Angela Clarke - So that film was your first foray into film festivals then and so I'm guessing around about that time you started researching your first feature doc ***Lost and Sound*** because ***Lost and Sound*** comes out in 2012, but I'd read in a few sources it had taken you about 3 years or thereabouts from start to finish so can you tell us a bit about it and again what attracted you to that particular subject?

Lindsey Dryden - ***Lost and Sound*** originally came about as a short. I was developing it as a short and I was really lucky to be a part of a kind of cohort of people who were amazingly supported by Sheffield Docfest. For a period of time

I think they were the most enriching, dynamic, thoughtful, truly independent space to develop independent filmmakers and with an ethos that brought in people who weren't sort of typical. They brought in people who weren't wealthy, who weren't necessarily able bodied, or who weren't white, which weren't men who weren't straight.

They were really thoughtful about whose voices they supported, and so I got to do lots of programmes with them, including a lot of pitch training because I was very bad at it, (*laughs*) and very nervous. And so I developed ***Lost and Sound*** as a short through the Mini Meet Markets at that time that Sheffield were running. And as we developed it, it wasn't as if broadcasters were leaping at the chance to support it, but it just became a bigger story than I initially thought it was.

So I got to collaborate with Animal Monday, who were a production company in Brighton, led by Kat Mansoor and Wil Hood and Adam Levis and they had made a beautiful film, an extraordinary film called ***Here's Johnny*** and I just thought that we had things in common, and we did. And so we started developing things together and so it became a feature length film. So at that time, there was a really dynamic landscape in the UK for independent feature length documentaries that were creative and ended up on places like BBC Wonderland, More 4, or True Stories, and also could make international sales and so we were very, very lucky just to be part of that era, only just!

And so ***Lost and Sound*** is about three musicians or music lovers who are deaf. So one is a little girl who lost her hearing as a baby who was born into a family of musicians; one music critic who lost his hearing suddenly later in life, and the other is a dancer who had been born deaf, but found her method of communication was most comfortable in dance. And I wanted to explore that topic because it affected me personally. I've been partially deaf since I was a child and at that point had lots of diagnosis indicating I was likely to lose more of my hearing and so it was something that was very, very much on my mind and very personal and quite distressing.

And so it felt exciting to explore those stories together, with different families and individuals who were navigating their own experiences of hearing loss. And I would say it isn't a film about deafness – you know deaf culture is an extraordinary specific thing. I think it is a film about losing hearing rather than living within deaf culture. And I didn't necessarily have the terminology at the time, at the very beginning to understand that or describe that. And that is part of me having grown up in the hearing world, and at that point not knowing much about deaf culture. So yes, it took us about three years and we were funded by people like the Wellcome Trust and it was an extraordinary experience and for which we were all paid very, very minimally but we did get to, I got to collaborate with extraordinary people all the way through and it was a real highlight.

Angela Clarke - It was really beautiful film and I remember seeing it at Sheffield Documentary Festival at the time and I remember there were lots of lovely graphics and you know the visual storytelling in it was really beautiful as

well. And also I think It was probably the first story that, (*pauses*) it was probably the first story I had ever seen where I considered what it was like to lose your hearing because I don't know that I had seen anything else like that before.

Lindsey Dryden –Mmm.

Angela Clarke - And so how did you find the participants for that particular story? How long did that process take? Where did you look, and did you have a particular agenda or idea in your head of certain people you wanted to have or did you just go on the basis of lets see what is out there and who has got an on-going narrative?

Lindsey Dryden – It was exactly that, it was looking for people who had spoken in some way about those narratives and it was a combination of you know reading things in the press, contacting deaf music organisations and asking if there was anybody they thought they might want to introduce to me. Speaking to hospitals and medical contacts etc, and I would say if I was making that film again now, I would have a much richer, deeper understanding of the social v's medical models of disability, and I probably wouldn't approach it in such a medicalised way.

At that time I was kind of motivated by the personal medical experience I was having of further loss and what that meant, but I think if I was making it again I would be even more passionate about infusing it with a really confident deaf perspective that wasn't about loss. I engaged with lots of deaf folks at the time, but I think there weren't sort of on-going narratives, partly because people weren't struggling, people weren't worried about their hearing or their deafness and that is a wonderful thing and so I ended up focussing on these individuals who I loved, and was very, very lucky to spend time with and you know I'm still in touch with.

Angela Clarke – And so why did it take three years from start to finish? I think sometimes when people come into film at the start, I think that most people underestimate the logistics of how long it takes to make a film, and the logistics of how long it takes to dredge up your various 25p's from 950 different pots (*laughs*) and so I wondered was it that – or was it something to do with the story in particular?

Lindsey Dryden - Your questions are so good! (*laughs*)

Angela Clarke – Or a combination of everything? (*laughing*)

Lindsey Dryden - It's exactly that. I mean I don't know of a independent, creative feature length documentary that doesn't take many years, and I think sometimes it's because the stories are absolutely unfolding in real time and you are filming something that requires time itself to blossom into whatever those experiences are for those people.

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And simultaneously, you are often working with limited budgets, doing bits piece-by-piece, and raising money as you go. Unless a film raises all of its budget at the beginning, which is quite unusual for independent feature documentary you know *(pauses)* I would love to be able to combine the editorial independence you get with a bit by bit fundraising methodology with the - I'd love to have a budget at the start! But you don't unusually get independent editorial control and money at the start, at the same time so I think those factors, it always something to consider. *(laughs)*

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And I know lots of brilliant, brilliant feature length documentary film makers who may have planned to finish their edit one year and release the next year and actually have ended up pushing everything back by a year, which is a huge undertaking, particularly if there is economic pressure on anybody in the team, but if it's what the story needs!

I think we are really lucky in the independent documentary field - unfortunately mostly in the US and Europe, there is a struggle in the UK documentary field at the moment, because there are so few resources and many issues that have recently been identified usefully by a study by the University of the West of England.

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But you know we are lucky we have organisations and bodies, and there is a real framework for developing work and for making independent feature documentary. And there is an enormous, incredible community and to be honest I think lots of filmmakers question every month, every week why they do this if they still can, what a privilege it is, but what an impact it can have on your real life, but the reason I do it is because I get to work with an extraordinary community of people who I don't want to be without.

Angela Clarke - Mmm. It's such a complicated thing and I think not enough is spoken about when you start off at the beginning of the process, if you've no idea what your budget is, it is difficult to work out how creative you can be because you don't know what you are capable of doing.

Lindsey Dryden - Mmm.

Angela Clarke - Or the remits within which you have got to work.

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Lindsey Dryden - But there is also a real magic in not knowing what you are doing, and in finding your people, and bringing all of that magic together. If I'd know how difficult a film like that *(Lost and Sound)* was going to be to make in terms of time and money and the sort of economic model, and the impact that it had on me personally economically, I wouldn't have done it. And I'm really glad I did it, so I think you know that is a place of real privilege to be able to say that, to know that I could continue to earn money in other ways after that film was out for example. But I think there is something beautiful in taking the leap and having faith in your own voice, and in the voices of the people you are working

with whose stories you are part of telling. There is magic in that because you don't really know yet how it might go wrong. *(laughing)*

Angela Clarke - How dreadfully awful it might potentially be? *(laughs)* But I think also as well that is a good example of starting out with a film that you feel enormously passionate about because I think if you have a huge amount of passion at the beginning, then there is a chance you will still have at least a scrap of that passion left by the time you kind of hurtle through to the end point of the process when you know you are broken and bruised.

Lindsey Dryden - Well I think also there's a thing worth flagging about that. *(pauses)* Some stories are so precious and so personal I think it's important to find the right time for them. And part of me honestly dreams about making a short version of *Lost and Sound* now that follows up, and refreshes its thinking and basically puts into reality what I have learnt because I think what I wasn't aware of at the time - was how there was a real appetite around that time for stories that were told that came from such a personal place.

Angela Clarke - Mmmm.

Lindsey Dryden - Sundance and lots of other organisations really support that kind of storytelling and I didn't know that kind of support existed. I didn't know at that's stage necessarily, how to include the value perhaps of my perspective within the stories of other people and there is always a part of me that wishes I had waited till I knew more.

Angela Clarke - Mmm.

Lindsey Dryden - And obviously that is not to say..., I'm deeply proud of the people in it and the stories that unfolded, and the journey that we all went on together so I certainly you know I wouldn't do it differently, you know. And yet some stories I think when they are very personal, they are worth doing right. I'm working with a filmmaker at the moment that is telling a very personal story and the timing, I think he has made a great choice...

Angela Clarke - How did you find that process of stepping up from having done the short to doing the feature as a director? What did you find the most challenging about that whole process? What was different about it?

Lindsey Dryden - I think we were really lucky in the sense that I was working with filmmakers who had recently done something similar. Kat and Wil and Adam are fantastic independent filmmakers and independent thinkers. They really brought me into this fold of sort of amazing people who were supportive and trustworthy, communicative and fun and so I got to do that work in a really safe space and it was pretty organic. I think that was also a real benefit.

I mean the biggest challenges, I think were trying to make enough time to do it well for everybody. And there was one particular expert that we worked with

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that was incredible and I wish that we had been able to go deeper into his expertise. I wish that we had been able to do that and what I often recommend now, that I hadn't even thought of at the time, would be not just to make additional resources around the film, you know like short films or clips from behind the scenes, that kind of thing. But actually to have resourced them properly, and that was something that I actually intended to do at the time but didn't manage to, because the budget was just so tiny.

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And I have worked on films since whose budgets were 10 x that amount and I wouldn't say they are 10 times the quality of film and I think that you probably make a film like that (*Lost and Sound*) once, because after you have done that, you realise you mustn't ever do it again economically. And so I think honestly, the economic challenges were the most difficult. How can you as people who don't come from wealth, how can you resource yours and other people's time to do something that deserves to be done well beautifully? That was really tough.

Angela Clarke – And also from memory, because of the nature of the subject matter as well you had a lot of big pieces of music in that film, so you know when you are on a minimal budget....

Lindsey Dryden – Mmm.

Angela Clarke – Like how did you deal with those kinds of elements? Did that inform what you could and couldn't put in the film?

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Lindsey Dryden - In some ways I think those limitations are also hugely valuable because we weren't making a film with a huge budget, we were making something driven by passionate people, and so we had to pay for some of that music, but we certainly didn't have to pay the kind of figures you would have paid if you had been on a BBC commission you know, or if you had been on a broadcaster commission for example.

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And so I got to have direct conversations with a lot of the owners of that music and just said, is this a thing you would support us using and if so, how might we make that work? And people were incredibly generous, and I think that is often the nature of independent film you know, we were making it because we had to and because the stories of the people in it were so worth telling and so extraordinary. And so actually from the point of view of music, we were lucky to raise, we did some crowd funding, to raise money for the music clearances and we did have to pay for it, but our budget for music was so much smaller than it would have been, had it been a big shiny contemporary production. And I remain really grateful to those musicians who were prepared to receive an email and say, "Yeh, I'm up for this", and that was wonderful.

Angela Clarke – And I think that is usually a lesson learnt along the way isn't it as well, allowing yourself enough time towards that end section of the filmmaking process to rely on the fact that if you have to reach out and ask for things and negotiate, that not everyone is just at the end of their computer

waiting for you to just write them with your email saying please can I have that for nothing/reduced costs? *(laughs)*

Lindsey Dryden - *(laughs)*

Angela Clarke - And I know I haven't certainly given enough time for those things in the past for but its all things that you learn along the way isn't it!

Lindsey Dryden I think there is a real expectation in the independent film world, that if you are making a real high quality film that you are somehow magically well resourced. And I think that partly comes from the fact that folks doing full time jobs, making decisions and making offers of funding, they are well resourced. They are well paid 5 days a week to do their jobs and the majority of independent filmmakers aren't and something I found really challenging which is actually not so difficult with ***Lost and Sound*** because there were no expectations of us, is this assumption that you are going to be able to reply to them to people instantly, that you are going to be on call. And I don't mean someone in your team but someone externally, whether it's a funder or a lawyer, not your own lawyers but kind of funder lawyers and those kind of particular funders.

There is an expectation amongst external bodies that you can resource your time really effectively and that is often not an easy thing to do. And so with ***Lost and Sound*** the lack of expectation was really helpful but I do remember very distinctly standing backstage before a Q & A session, talking with some other filmmakers. I basically spent a year sort of touring with ***Lost and Sound*** after it premiered. We had a South By South West film festival showing and we had the most amazing experience but it was only about 8 months in and I realised other filmmakers on that tour that were doing the same thing with their work had already been developing their next two films, and had already resourced how they were going to pay for the beginning of making their next two films. So I had a real gap of going, 'Ohhh I hadn't thought about that!' And now it seems absurd but I think we have to be really generous with ourselves, and each other, about learning things as we go.

Angela Clarke - Mmm.

Lindsey Dryden - This is independent film, this is a world in which there aren't rules and you immerse yourself in the experiences that you having and that you learn at the right moment for you perhaps, if you're lucky. But I remember thinking, I haven't planned this, I haven't planned the next stage and I'm suddenly behind and that was something that I learned a lot from at the time.

Angela Clarke - And I think when you're in that mind-set, especially if you're juggling other paid work whilst making a film, you're so consumed by just kind of getting through the week. You've got your paid work to do and you're juggling the film in any free time you have around about that, and especially when you're on that journey for the first time, and you are learning along the way, there is often very little time to reflect on making that plan or strategy.

Lindsey Dryden – Mmm.

Angela Clarke - And I think also as well because *Lost and Sound* was well received, I think there is an additional pressure on filmmakers to then immediately think, 'Oh what is my plan now'. There is an expectation that you will immediately do something else and I think there is not enough honesty about starting off in that process especially if you don't live somewhere where there is a huge network of filmmakers around about you. It's difficult as well to gauge how many projects should I be juggling on the side and I don't think you learn those things until once you're kind of in it.

One of the other things I was going to ask you about *Lost and Sound* - you did some impact producing elements as it were for that film, so at what point did you start to think about that particular strategy during the process of making the film? When were those seeds planted and how long did it take you to do?

Lindsey Dryden - I think we learnt during the filmmaking how important it would be. Given how hard it was to finance and given the attitude of so many funders, which was - this was really exciting and we can't wait for a rough cut - and that was really understandable because I as an untested director at that time. But you start to realise that the possibility for easy distribution is not in your control, and you know I see the process of storytelling as a process of engaging with audiences. I didn't necessarily know that then, but for me distribution and audience engagement or impact outreach, all of those things are connected.

And so we started thinking how are we going to get this to the audience it matters too, even if we don't have additional broadcasts? And so you know, I think as filmmakers, I think you are often building relationships with all kinds of organisations and individuals throughout the filmmaking process and when you're making an independent film, you sort of build lots of relationships along the way and I think they are part of who becomes your community or audience for the film going forward.

I didn't necessarily know how to formalise that at the time but it has always been a priority for me to think about who the audience is, and where they are and particularly difficult to reach audiences because those honestly are the audiences I'm most interested in. And I also think from the point of view of planning and distribution and everything else, it's important to know the specifics of who your audience is and I think often people say it is everybody, but it's very hard to reach everybody, and so who are the people at the very core of your audience?

Who are the ones you most desperately want to reach? Who are they and what are they into and why do they care about this? And it sort of goes from there! But again, that takes a lot of resources to do that and any sort of impact engagement and outreach campaign well, that needs time, needs to be funded and certainly wasn't in our case so you know we did our best, but we certainly didn't do as much as we could have done. We didn't have the resources that would have been

needed to make an extraordinary kind of campaign but we did lots of theatrical screenings and we did have amazing Q & A's and as I said we travelled with the film, took it to deaf audiences and hearing audiences, music audiences and film audiences, and people all over the world and had fantastic conversations as a result. And I think that is so much about what impact producing is about – how can a film change the way people think, feel act, how can you formalise that? But also if you don't have resources, how can you at least start those conversations and equip people with some basic resources to take that forward themselves?

Angela Clarke – Absolutely. And I think that you've probably maybe partially answered this already given what you said before but I was going to say so during that time then, the film lands in 2012 and during this time you've done the film festival circuit throughout 2013 but around that time you start to collaborate with other directors on a variety of other projects too that kind of align with your values as a filmmaker. And so what was it that attracted you to produce with other directors, what was it that took you into that space?

Lindsey Dryden – I think there are a couple of different answers to that that are all sort of interrelated, because throughout making the kind of long slow to finish films that I've worked on, I've always been working on other films, whether directing shorts or making art films and I just I think at that point I hoped that the experiences I'd had as new filmmaker might be something useful that I could deploy with other new filmmakers.

I decided I wanted to start producing with other people particularly for sort of sensitive, ethical projects based around the body that seems to have been a real theme throughout my work. But I also knew economically, producing is a more controllable economic model and you know if I could spend my enter life writing and directing would I? Possibly (*pauses for thought*) no, I wouldn't because I love producing. But you know if only around 6% of directors are women and 50% of producers are women, there is a much better opportunity to survive economically doing a range of work, and that has absolutely been a factor.

And I think the real value of both producing and directing is how much you learn from each other, and how much you get to spend time with extraordinary teams and so at that stage, I had mentioned to a few friends I'd love to start producing, and so when certain films came up people would recommend me to those teams and I'd start exploring relationships. So it was quite an organic, and it was motivated by wanting to be part of other people's story telling and wanting to be supportive and bringing together what I had learnt as a new director myself, but also wanting to be able to have some control, and earning money as an independent filmmaker.

Angela Clarke - Yeh that is the difficult thing to do isn't it, to keep sustaining yourself? I know there are several projects you have been involved with but if we could start by talking about the feature doc *Unrest* first of all. I loved it, it was on Netflix, and I'm sure lots of people will have seen it but can you refresh people's memories if they aren't familiar with it?

Lindsey Dryden – *Unrest* is a film directed by Jennifer Brea and she set out to make a film to essentially save her own life because she found that she was experiencing an illness that medics didn't take seriously. So in order to understand what was happening to her, she set out to find other people having similar experiences and found hundreds of thousands of other people having similar experiences also being ignored and disbelieved. It was her first film ever, but she is an extraordinary thinker and voice and planner, and so she thought through every element of how to make a project like that successful, and began with crowd funding. And that was a real moment I think in bringing together a community that only expanded as we made the film over the course of several years. So it's a film that tells very personal stories of people all having experiences with the illness ME or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and what it means to have to fight and battle to be considered believable.

Angela Clarke – It was a really moving film, and it was based around Jennifer and her husband Omar, it's their journey from the point at which they have fallen in love to Jennifer becoming unwell and so at what point in the process did you guys meet and how did you get involved in the project?

Lindsey Dryden - I think Jen was looking at that time for co-producers in different countries because she was working completely from bed, she was too unwell to travel herself and was looking for a UK co-producer. And at that point, I was on another project which I ended up leaving because it wasn't the right fit, and so I was able to come back to her after she had initially asked for a meeting and say, 'I am now free', and I think I was recommended to her by people at Sheffield Docfest.

We started talking and felt that we had kind of you know, we had a good working relationship at that point and we didn't actually meet in person for something like 10 months or thereabouts. We started working together completely remotely, which of course is something that people are now completely used to doing, but at that point it was quite unusual. And at that point, we first met together in person at Sundance when we were at the documentary film program, at the labs together. And I first met the American co-producer Trish Gillespie because we were sharing a bed in some kind persons chalet in the snow somewhere and yes it went from there...*(laughing)*.

Angela Clarke – The glamour of film, see they don't tell you about all of that when you get into it do they? *(laughs)* What was it about that particular project – what was it that excited you about that project? What was it specifically that you thought I can add something to that?

Lindsey Dryden – I'm someone who is really interested in this idea of unconventional experiences of the body and what it means to navigate through the world when your body doesn't do what traditional abelist society expects it to do. I really value the sort of rebellion of having a bodily experience that is different and I think there is something immensely powerful in that and you know Jen's voice and vision were completely undeniable from the very beginning

and I think as a producer that is really exciting. Because you know you can bring your skills to help guide what they are aiming for, to add to and enhance and collaborate and I think that is what appealed to me at that stage.

Also it's a story about women's voices, and it's a story about the voices of women of colour as well and I was talking to friend yesterday and I think that a lot of the work that we do is driven by a kind of rage and fury that people aren't considered valuable, and that everybody isn't considered valuable and you know that is a really simplistic expectation and it's a really simplistic description of that issue, but I think I recognised very early on the things we could do with a film like that, to challenge people, and to reveal through intimate storytelling and honest representations of people who are both struggling but are also immensely powerful why it's so ludicrous not to take peoples voices seriously.

Angela Clarke I think, there is more and more awareness being raised of those issues, and I suppose the other thing I wanted to ask was what's the ideal producers role for you in terms of what do you like to do when you get involved in a project?

Lindsey Dryden – I would say the ideal producers role is one that is creatively led, in the sense that when filmmakers contact me and they say, 'I really need a producer because I don't know about spread sheets and I'm crap at budgeting', that is not a recognition of what a producer is. I would say a producer is a creative collaborator who is there with you making storytelling decision, enhancing your perspective and being a sort of additional pair of eyes who can you know reflect in ways that you can't and will do that in a way that is supportive of your vision.

It's about making that vision real but doing it in a way that embraces lots of perspectives to enrich it and so my ideal role is to be part of the creative foundation of storytelling and to work with filmmakers who love to collaborate and who are prepared to have courageous conversations together, especially on personal storytelling, which is often what I work on. People are taking risks together and that's not easy and as I've mentioned audiences are really important to me and so often I'm a part of creating early on what it means to think about audience.

What the film can do, where it will do that and building those relationships as early as you can within the resources that you have available. I think the ideal kind of producing scenario involves a range of producers honestly. I don't know any producer who is perfect at the creative collaboration, the hard business side, the financing and all of those are things that I do as a producer. But I love working with other producers to build a combination of those skills. You know some people are brilliant closers business wise, but they are not the person who someone would do a favour for... You know when a film needs it, and so I think you have to put together that combination of producing voices.

Angela Clarke – Yes, especially when you are doing a film where you had characters based all across the world and there are obviously opportunities that can be mined in the various countries in terms of when the film comes to land.

Lindsey Dryden - I'd say that *Unrest* started out with both Trish Gillespie in New York and me as co-producers and the co-producing role is a really important one. Thankfully we now have the Documentary Producers Association Guidelines to really outline what those different roles mean, but it's about doing a specific part of a film and not all of it, not being across all of it.

And then over time, the collaboration expanded and I did become across all of it with Jen and so I became a kind of full producer, but I think those distinctions are really important because co-producers are absolutely really valuable and you know they do something specific but they don't necessarily have overall responsibility for the journey of the film from beginning to end and beyond.

Angela Clarke – And what were the biggest challenges with that particular film from your perspective? Obviously you were dealing with a contributor that was going to be confined to a particular space in order to be able to conduct a lot of the interviews, or were there other elements of the process what was more challenging?

Lindsey Dryden – It's really tricky to remember the kind of specifics (*laughs*) of what that was like day to day because it was so intense and busy. I think the challenges we had were around convincing people that this story was going to do something extraordinary.

Angela Clarke – Mmm.

Lindsey Dryden - We were very lucky and well supported by lots of organisations, but it wasn't like we had people who wanted to buy and promote and distribute the film early on. We built relationships with wonderful people, who had their eye on the film, and there were people who we'd long to work with as broadcasters, and we were delighted with who did pick up the film. But with any kind of film you're just trying to encourage the outside world, the risk-averse film world, to believe in something that hasn't been tested yet. And that is where the great excitement is because you are demonstrating that you can do something new and it's worth doing, and so I think that was a big challenge along the way.

Angela Clarke - How long did that one take to make from start to finish? Just as a ballpark?

Lindsey Dryden - I started working with Jen in 2014 and she had already been making the film since late 2013 and we had our world premier at Sundance in Jan 2017.

Angela Clarke - Okay so at that time then it was still probably, certainly from a UK perspective, people were not at all, certainly from my memory, sympathetic to ME as a medical condition. It had become the butt of a lot of jokes in the popular press and in comedy and so you know I was thinking was that something that was a hindrance to yourselves?

Lindsey Dryden - I would say that with a film like *Unrest*, the most incredible sort of asset is the community itself who knows what this illness is, who lives with it and navigates it. And so that was the sort of community that Jen was building throughout the making of the film and we knew particularly in the UK and in Denmark but also in the US, we knew that those were our targets. Those were the places that this film was for, to make that change, and so actually we weren't necessarily trying to talk to people who didn't want to talk to us, at that stage.

But it meant that from early post production, we were being extremely detailed about what our campaign was going to look like and how we were going to understand all of those factors that make them disbelieve people with this illness and how we were going to address all of them so that was very strategic. And I think that is a huge and helpful driver, you know to do the work of planning for that impact campaign, which was a huge achievement I think in the UK. The entrenched discrimination in the medical profession against people with that illness was so serious, that we had to approach it extremely carefully. But we did so with an enormous amount of passion to make those changes.

Angela Clarke - And why is it you've got so much fire in your belly for doing bespoke distribution, why is that so important to you?

Lindsey Dryden - *(laughs)* Oh that is a dangerous question - this is a podcast not therapy I must remember that...

Angela Clarke - Well I mean it can act as both! *(both laughing)*

Lindsey Dryden - I mean there were just wonderful films that speak to dominant audiences, *(and by that I mean)* the people who aren't the biggest community in the world but do have the most power in the world whether it is economic, social or cultural. I'm not really interested in those audiences - I'm interested in the folks who have been underserved and who don't see themselves valued or respected in media or on screen. And so I think it's an enormous privilege to be part of trying to make connections with and create storytelling with and for those audiences. That is a wonderful thing to be part of and I also think it is necessary, because I also think that traditional economic models of filmmaking success speak to dominant audiences and I'm just not interested in them *(laughs)* as a sort of a core community, all stories, all storytelling shouldn't be for them.

Angela Clarke - It's already well served anyway as you say, there are far bigger pools of people to engage with that haven't necessarily been taken on that

13 same journey. And so to accompany that film, you also headed up a VR experience that sat alongside it. What was it that appealed to you about that particular technology at the time? What was it you wanted to get out of that and what did you think you could bring to the story with VR?

Lindsey Dryden - I would say that I was a small part of that team that made that VR project happen. I was a sort of a supportive part of that team and you know Jen again who is the sort of voice and vision of *Unrest* was really the driver of how that could connect with people. I think it was such a smart decision because you know there is this idea that you can't experience the world through another body and actually with things like VR and AR you can, and it was something I always wanted to explore with *Lost and Sound*.

14 What does it mean to hear with someone else's ears or what to not hear through someone else's ears because of course you know deafness and hearing isn't binary ideas, they are deeply specific? They are complicated - you know I have a combination of absolutely no hearing at times and super hearing at others, and that is unique to my particular experience. But everybody has that uniqueness and I longed to explore that with some amazing scientists who were doing that work when we were making *Lost and Sound* so I think that idea of what it means to immerse yourself in someone else bodily experience was at the forefront with us for VR and we got this extraordinary French team who continued to make you know world class VR storytelling. So yeh it was a meaningful part of giving people a new perspective on the story.

Angela Clarke - That film has had quite a life beyond the film premier circuit, and I was thinking, when your doing something like that and you are engaging in a film like that, when do you think, 'Right I need to stop that and start the next project.' How do you work those things out?

Lindsey Dryden - I think for every project its slightly different and it's really important to have conversations with your team early on about what your goals and expectations are because often they can be very different. Some producers might be expecting to manage a budget for the next ten years, to be managing all the distribution elements and in the case of *Unrest* you know Jen had a lot of foresight about putting together the resources to fund a team. And so once the film was made and once we were kind of I guess a year out of the kind of festival launch - we launched theatrically in the Autumn of 2017, after world premiering in January, I would say personally I was included for at least another year after the world premier.

16 Jen had the vision to plan for that and she built an extraordinary team. There were so many people who did that work; it wasn't just the kind of producing filmmaking team. She formed an organisation called ME Action, which continues to do extraordinary things, and that formation was necessary to some of the achievements that have been made. Only last year the NICE guidelines in the UK were changed about how people were treated with this illness because of that continued work and you know some filmmakers don't want to do that, and that

is great and I think it's really important to say that not every documentary has to be about impact.

I would also say not every documentary put on TV needs to be about true crime, *(laughs)* so there is balance to be found as to what gets funded and what gets made. But I think you have to talk through what your goals are and how long that is going to take and what the requirements are because if you have your world premiere and you do several other festivals and you get your press and that might enable you to make sales and book theatrical slots and that kind of thing, and there are pretty standard milestones for how that can work that you can research from several case studies including the one we write about on *Unrest*, but it is about being clear about expectations and hopes early on.

Angela Clarke - Yeh for sure. And so then moving on after *Unrest*, I wondered if we could talk a little bit about the Emmy award winning short documentary series you produced - *Trans in America*. This was a series of three shorts wasn't it, so how again did you become involved in that?

Lindsey Dryden - With *Trans in America* I was recommended to the ACLU (*American Civil Liberties Union*) by an incredible colleague of mine when they were looking for a producer with an insight and lived experience in LGBTQI life to put together this series. They had an amount of funding that they wanted to use specifically to tell a certain kind of story and they wanted us to make three short documentaries and so that was a really beautiful process. I got to work with just a catalogue of extraordinary people - everybody collaborating with the same goals in mind and it came from the ACLU, which was just brilliant.

Angela Clarke - I loved the series it was really moving and all the contributors were superb characters in their own right, and I suppose I especially loved Kai and her mum Kimberly? *(querying the name)*

Lindsey Dryden - Yeh.

Angela Clarke - Yeh Kai and Kimberly! Kai was so hugely articulate and felt like such an old head on a very young body in terms of understanding what they were going through and what that meant for them and everything else. How did you find the contributors that all took part in that how long did that process take?

Lindsey Dryden - I think something we learnt with that particular series was everything took longer than we hoped and everything took longer than we expected. And even though we had a budget, it certainly wasn't a budget that enabled us realistically to resource the amount of time that everything took for everybody and I think often people might not be aware when you are making a feature doc or series like that that everybody is probably working on it part time. And so I think it's probably worth allowing for generosity in those time scales and we learned a lot about when things were urgent and fast and when things were slow.

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And in terms of the process of looking for those stories, we were really interested in looking to work with trans, non-binary and LGBTQ + filmmakers to tell those stories. It was absolutely crucial those stories were told by, and imbued with, you know people with expertise in those lived experiences. So we did lots of call outs to organisations that we knew were doing similar work, looking for access to filmmakers who already had some access to stories they wanted to tell and that was how we found the directors.

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Angela Clarke - Ah okay. And then I was wondering for people maybe looking to make a documentary featuring vulnerable contributors, and especially children, what advice would you offer then when it come to dealing with young contributors? What kind of things should people be mindful of or take into consideration because obviously making films in the current climate you can access the whole world and films can go on a myriad of online platforms.

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But that also brings with it the possibility of taking those kinds of films into audiences or territories where people aren't as familiar with trans people and don't understand their journey. So how do you deal with that, how do you prep people for taking part in that process?

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Lindsey Dryden - I think that, I'd probably re-frame it as sort of people from marginalised communities, rather than vulnerable communities and I think that there are always elements of that process you have to talk through in as much detail as possible. What are your expectations? Where do you want it to go? What do you think might happen? But on that series, as with every other project I had worked on, there are always things you can't expect and can't anticipate.

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For example, we hadn't anticipated that there would be so much media attention on one particular story, and how that would exclude the other people who had told their stories, and how that would actually replicate a lot of the structural inequalities, the racism frankly, that was endemic to the media as to how those stories were understood in the first place. And you know I think we would loved to have figured out how to anticipate that better, and certainly have done going forward because of course these things have a real impact on people when we can't control so many elements of what happens with a film once it meets the world.

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And you know I always write a kind of production bible at the beginning of a process that sets out what all our goals and intentions and hopes are. What our values are, what our ethos is, and that unfolds over time. And I would say it's not always easy for people to take that information in when you are in the process of making a film together because often its new for them. But I think something to really think about is contracting, and really how you formalise your expectations with the people you are working with.

And so we were really lucky to have the sort of blessing of the ACLU to create release forms that actually respected people's contributions. So we built in paying, I mean we didn't have a big budget, but it was paying a small

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honorarium, so it wasn't actually a payment for their appearance but it was in respect of the time that they had committed. If the film profited economically, which sadly it didn't, but if the series did, then we built into people's contract that they would be entitled to a percentage of these profits. And also these were bespoke contracts, that were based on a dialogue with our participants about what their concerns were, and what it meant to be represented and to hand over the power of being represented. We also worked with an advisory board that were amazing and completely critical to the process who were all trans artists and activists and the parent of a trans child and who had deep experiences of navigating this world, and that was really necessary to telling stories like this.

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But not only did we engage in an advisory board and pay them small fees, we also made sure that if they gave us feedback that we took it because there is no point in offering people the opportunity to contribute and then say, 'Oh no I'm actually..., our sort of paternalistic filmmaking process means that we are not going to take your feedback seriously', so we made amendments during the early stage and late stage of the edit to reflect people's points of view. And just tried to bring as much sensitivity as we could to the process and as I said there are things that you can't always control, but I think that the dialogue between the team and the participants was really crucial.

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Angela Clarke - Yeh for sure, having those conversations not just at the start of the process but continuing them all the way through is important. That is really interesting, the point that you made about not all of those films receiving the same amounts of attention because when you are looking at that process - you are treating them all as the same, but that doesn't mean they are going to be received the same way.

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Then last but not least I wondered if we could talk about *Ahead of the Curve* which you just exec produced, and that is now starting to do the rounds on the festival circuit isn't it? Can you tell me a little bit about what drew you to that film?

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Lindsey Dryden - Absolutely. So *Ahead of the Curve* is a feature documentary directed and produced by Jen Rainin and Rivkah Beth Meadow in the San Francisco Bay area and it tells the story of Curve magazine, this extraordinary kind of ground breaking lesbian magazine that was started in the 90s and it tells the story of also the extraordinary woman who started it called Franco. So I was invited to help support the team towards the end of post production, and to help them think about how the film might get out into the world, and they are two of my favourite humans who have had a really significant vision for what this film could do and how important it is that it does it.

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Queer women are so desperately underserved as audiences and we are longing for brilliant story telling, absolutely longing for it and to pay for it too, but there is just this kind of constant de-prioritisation of queer women as audiences and like so many films and filmmakers, they have had to navigate what it means to release a film during a pandemic, and they have done incredible things. You

13 know what would have been a beautiful world premier at the Castro Theatre in San Francisco during Pride week, which would have been magical, or at a major festival earlier in the year.

While those things weren't possible, they created the most highly attended event at the film festival where it world premiered by doing it outside at a drive in cinema where everybody was at a safe distance and everybody decorated their cars. I decorated my car too here too in the UK with Pride flags and sort of danced round it. (*laughing*) They brought people together in really creative ways and so that is the kind of thing they have been doing over the past year.

14 **Angela Clarke** – Yeh well that's the thing, everyone is adapting to the challenges that are popping up! And so what projects have you got coming up, in the near future that you can talk about? Is there anything you can give us a tiny vague snippet of information on?

Lindsey Dryden – I have one feature film in development with the BFI, and I'm producing another personal documentary with two co-directors and that film is completely disabled led. It's bold and creative and personal and intimate and is a really exciting proposition. And I'm exec producing some shorts at the moment with some new filmmakers, black and brown film makers and queer filmmakers in the south west of England and I'm writing a couple of scripts and I'm just developing something to direct at the moment as well...

15 **Angela Clarke** – And also one thing I wanted to ask you about, I know more recently you've recently set up an organisation to encourage more people with disabilities to come into the industry - could you give us a little bit more information on that?

Lindsey Dryden – Absolutely! Two of the organisations that have been most significant for me in terms of building community and learning from incredible people and making projects together have been Queer Producers and now FWD-Doc (*pronounced Forward Doc*), which I co-founded with Jim LeBrecht, Day Al-Mohamed and Alys Nahmias in the US, and it's an organisation dedicated to sort of supporting and uplifting the incredible deaf and disabled film talent that already exists. So just trying to create sort of pathways for new deaf and disabled talent. And also just trying to bring together new opportunities for these incredible storytellers, given that 1 billion people in the world are deaf and disabled and yet again so many of these audiences are so underserved.

16 There are so many, many stories to be told and so many audiences to engage with so that is the kind of work that we do and we have an amazing membership who do a lot of that work too. So we do things like we contribute to industry conversations and industry projects around representation and around things like you know Covid safety or what it means to make accessible cinema. We hold member events, we speak on panels and we sort of take part as an organisation that is really inspired by groups like Brown Girls Doc Mafia and A-Doc and other groups that have been set up to support marginalised communities and

13 underrepresented communities. So the sort of founding team began that work almost two years ago and it really expanded into an amazing community.

Angela Clarke – Okay and where can people go for that website – can you give us the website address or details?

Lindsey Dryden - I can so Forward Doc is Fwd-doc.org. And we've also just released a toolkit called *Changing the Narrative on Disability and Documentary Film* and it's a toolkit for inclusion and accessibility. So not just how do you make your films accessible, which is part of it, but crucially how do you work with amazing deaf and disabled talent and do that inclusively and thoughtfully and really prioritising those voices so that is a collaboration with Doc Society and Netflix.

14 **Angela Clarke** – And so to sum up then what is the most valuable lesson you've learn so far on your filmmaking journey?

Lindsey Dryden - Just a small question! *(laughs and pauses)* I think I think the most important lesson I've learnt is the value of collaboration. Courageous collaboration and finding people where you have shared values and you don't necessarily know how you're going to fund and resource that collaboration but you are on that journey together and you are really transparent about what you can offer each other.

15 I'm so lucky, I get to work with this enormous sort of collection of women, queer women, disabled women, black and brown women and people who are doing incredible things and I get to be a small part of that and I think that building of your team and finding who your people are, that's what makes anything work. Without that it's too hard. And also I think that what I've learned is that the process is as important as the outcome. I've worked on films where that isn't the case, and while the outcome might be extraordinary, the process behind the scenes isn't necessarily so.

And so it is really important for me to try and create processes where your values are embedded there too, as well as in the final outcomes because these are our lives you know. Working with people you are safe with, whom you trust and with whom collectively you can do something kind of magical that is the goal...

16 **Angela Clarke** - I think as filmmakers you know all you've got is your word, and your word is your bond and if you can work with other people who are from that same mind set as you, then it makes the whole process a lot less stressful along the way. But if you are not on the same page ethically from the beginning, and share the same values then there is not much you can do about that, and it's unlikely is going to change isn't it.

Lindsey Dryden - Mmm.

Angela Clarke – Well look it's been it's been great to speak to you and you've been really frank and open and honest. Thank you so much for sharing just a snapshot of your extensive experience in the industry, it's been really inspiring to hear. And if you want to know more about Lindsey and her work, then you can check out her website, Little By Little Films (dot) com where there is lots of information on her films and you can read more about the various projects she has been involved with over the years as we've really only scratched the surface today. So best of luck with all your projects in the future, and I really look forward to seeing more of your output soon.

Lindsey Dryden - Thank you.

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