'The Interview': The Darker Side of Julia Louis-Dreyfus

0:01

[Music] from The New York Times this is the interview I'm Lulu Garcia

0:08

Navaro at some point in almost every performance she gives Julia Louie drus

0:14

has this look if you've watched Seinfeld The New Adventures of Old Christine or V

0:19

you definitely know it it's that perfect mix of irritation and Defiance like

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she's saying try me that spikiness has always felt revelatory to me especially

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3 decades ago when Julia was first putting these kinds of women on our screens in recent years she's been

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moving in new more introspective directions but still pushing against conventional wisdom about women that's

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especially true on her wonderful hit podcast wiser than me where she interviews older female celebrities

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she's also doing more movies including two Independent films with the writer and director Nicole holler about the

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struggles of middle age and she's got a recurring role in the Marvel Cinematic Universe her newest

1:05

movie is called Tuesday it's directed by Dina op pusich and in it she plays a

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mother whose teenage daughter has a terminal illness it's a surreal dark fairy tale one of the main characters is

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a CGI parrot who represents death and as she told me she was nervous about taking

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it on clearly even in her 60s Julia is not done challenging herself and and

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those of us watching her here's my conversation with Julia Lou [Music]

1:37

dfus hi Lulu how are you I'm great how are you I'm good I have a lot of

1:42

questions about the new movie but it's a pretty heavy film so I just want to warm

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up a little with some other questions before we get into that sure am I right that you're in a new Marvel film at the

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moment it must be a very different kind of set to be on yeah really is what's

2:00

like when you're actually on set I mean is it as sort of manic as it might seem no not it's not manic at all it's very

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well organized it's very methodical and I

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don't mean that in a negative way particularly on this film they're very much focused on frankly the human story

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believe it or not and the I think they're trying to sort of go back to their Roots as it were for

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real and and so there's a lot of focus on that they're trying to stay away from

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as much I guess you call it CGI or whatever as possible so that the stunts

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are like everywhere and in fact I had to do a couple which I loved what stunts

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have you been doing and what's that been like because you don't you normally do movies with stunts no well I've been in movies with stunts but not in really

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ones I've performed and this and by the way I'm making this out to sound like

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I'm like flying through the air like a you know Captain America or whatever but

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I'm not um uh so it's just a very very very very brief stunt it's practically

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nothing so I don't want to you're not doing a Tom Cruz like flying over uh Canyon no I'm not on the motorcycle

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jumping off a cliff but even the little bit that I did do took a a few days of

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rehearsal and it's gobs of fun in fact the only thing I don't like is being away from home but other than that it's

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it's really been a very happy experience I'm I'm not kidding it's wild to witness

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it for example I just say one other quick thing on set now one of the two

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editors is on set and is doing a rough edit as we're shooting and the reason

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for this is so that it's a ultimate I mean if you have the budget to do that you have to have a certain budget to be

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able to do that but ultimately I I I think it's a a finan IAL savings because

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then in the moment on the day they it's like putting pieces of a puzzle together to get these things right and if you

4:08

realize you need that angle of this hand coming in from that direction you can

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get it on the day as opposed to trying to re-shoot it or realizing in the edit room 6 weeks later so it's a wild amount

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of uh detail and attention do you have complicated feelings about what the superhero

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franchise have done to films in general because you when you've chosen to do

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films lately they've been sort of smaller films there've been more intimate films and then you have you

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know these massive franchises that have taken over in so many ways so I'm just

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wondering how you look at that uh I look at it

4:52

gratefully I mean I don't look there's no guarantee that

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just because the movie is in a franchise it's going to work there's scores of examples of exactly that and even in the

5:05

Marvel Universe they've had some Clunkers so I'm not sure that the size

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of a franchise is the problem with the entertainment business I do believe that

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the corporations eating up corporations eating up corporations may be more of the problem but not the franchise itself

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if that makes sense you mean the consolidation in the industry with less competition and therefore yeah and lots

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of cooks and lots of people with opinions and so the idea of a new idea

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or an independent idea or an outside the box idea is uh harder

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to uh sell to make it seems well I guess that dovet tales really nicely let's

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talk about Tuesday uh your new film because that is exactly sort of the

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opposite it is a small film you play the mother of a terminally ill

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teenager but this is also a fantasy film in that death is portrayed by talking

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parrot why did you want to do this film well I I read the script and I was

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immediately intrigued by it because it was so

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unusual and the themes of the film captivated my imagination and that is to

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say loss and grief and

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motherhood and denial and death and dying all of that

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is interesting to me and I feel that this way of exploring these themes using

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magical realism to tell the story I'm not going to lie I was nervous about it

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because it's very strange and I met Dina

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a couple of times and we talked a great length cuz I wanted to really get a

7:04

sense of her and could I give my heart to her and trust her because if this

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didn't work if this really fell flat if this bird that's in the movie who's

7:16

played brilliantly by Arin Kenya if that doesn't work we've got a real problem

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and so I needed to talk to her very seriously about her intention and her

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vision and I am I I fell in love with her and the story and took this leap of

7:33

faith which it was yeah I mean in preparation for this and after watching the film we had a lot of discussions

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about the parrot and how to describe the parrot and what the parrot is it's an

7:46

unusual device in this movie and and not to get sort of all cish English seminar on you but oh God I won't be able to

7:53

answer but how do when you were coming to this and you were having these discussions what did you sort of see its

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meaning to be in the film I saw for me personally and it

8:06

doesn't mean this is for everyone because you can interpret this any way you like but for me he was

8:13

my death Doula he was my guide for me my

8:19

character that's a really great analogy because in the film he leads you through

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these various stages of dealing with the the death of your daughter and I have to

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say as a mother myself it was pretty hard to watch yeah I mean even talking about it as I can feel it it's hard to

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even talk about yeah you said that you were interested in exploring these

8:45

ideas can you tell me why um sure well they're

8:52

fundamental um it's funny how we're all going to die and everyone we know is

8:57

going to die we're all going to die die and yet we do not waste any time really thinking about that and I I probably

9:05

shouldn't use the word waste but we don't think about it a lot and that's maybe it's a good thing but it is

9:12

amazing because we all have that in common and it's not something you go

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through life considering a lot um I've lost people very close to me

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in my life and those losses are hard to

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reconcile still are I've given birth to two children and

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I I I don't want to be misunderstood but there's something about giving birth and the awesomeness of that and then when my

9:47

father died and I was with him when he died there is a similar

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thing the the waiting and I was struck

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by how similar that was in certain ways to waiting for a baby to

10:06

come and um it has a mystery to it that

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is undeniable as does the birth of a person and you know I also I myself had

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cancer uh now many years ago but even so the idea of that sort of coming to knock

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on your door was like alarming shall we say which is the

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understatement of the century but did it give you a different relationship with your own mortality I mean you described

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it as something knocking on your door mm it did not that I thought I'm leaving

10:46

that I'm going to die from this then I wouldn't allow myself to think it but it

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was right here chirping in my ear and I

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don't have a sense an arrogant sense of my immortality anymore I don't the way

11:03

you do when you're 20 I don't feel like that anymore I feel a little more

11:08

present and I feel uh a little more grateful yeah I know from other cancer

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survivors that it can fundamentally change your idea of how to live your life totally oh yeah oh yeah in a good

11:21

way oh yeah absolutely I have so much to celebrate and um I feel an enormous

11:30

sense of gratitude in this film you have the

11:37

scene where you say to your daughter I don't know who I am without you what the

11:43

world is without you in it yeah and I have to say it's a devastating line

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because I think any parent just knows how unimaginable it is to experience the

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loss of a child how did you while you were were making this film experience

12:01

out yourself I mean what were you tapping into stuff I didn't want to tap into so I um you know I don't want to

12:11

sound too actory please sound actory no I don't like that but I was on location

12:18

we shot this in London so I was not with my family and um those few days that we

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shot the pivotal scenes in the movie I had to call home a lot I I really uh

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was a tad unhinged it was a hard place to go in my mind uh and even though it's

12:42

pretend and I recognize that and I'm not in any way implying that it's not

12:49

pretend you do have to flirt um emotionally with stuff in a

12:56

very real way to give authentic to a performance and it was a hard thing to

13:01

do it was a hard thing to do and it was a hard thing to recover from after that's what I had to call home a lot

13:07

that was a hard time let's just put it that way it was hard so I'm going to shift out of the

13:14

movie just for a moment because it it is painful I think wait before you do can I

13:20

ask you a quick question of course I love your name is your real name Lulu or is that a a nickname so my real name is

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luris cuz I'm Hispanic lordis but I've always been Lulu since I was born it's a

13:34

very common nickname I'm Cuban and so I've always been Lulu and so that's who I am well lucky you lulu I love it thank

13:42

you um one of the messages of course in the film is not only that death is

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necessary but that it can be beautiful that it actually isn't something necessarily to be afraid of and I

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recently heard an episode of your podcast wiser than me where you interviewed Patty Smith and you talked

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about the different ways that you've processed the death of people in your own life have the conversations you've

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been having on your podcast helped you process the sort of many ways the surprising

14:13

ways in which people just deal with the hard things in their life yeah it's

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really one of the many impetuses to making this pot if that what is the

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plural of impetus but whatever empathy empati it's one of the

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empathy that sounds wrong let's use it um to having these conversations on

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the podcast because all of these women that I'm talking to have really lived

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very full long lives and that of course means they've experienced loss and I'm

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really interested to talk to them about how they move Beyond it or or with it or

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into it or what there I mean I'm just loving to have those conversations and I

15:07

want to hear from these women who have experienced an enormous amount of Life

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yeah I mean I find what's comforting about them and sometimes a little depressing is that how many of the same

15:22

themes right sexism Prejudice self-doubt they have experienced

15:28

themselves mhm and I'm wondering what is your takeaway from hearing these women

15:34

having gone through so many of the things that were still going through now

15:40

um there's a sense with most of them not everybody but there's a sense of okay

15:46

I'm done with that I don't know if we can swear on your podcast you can swear but anyway I'm done with that I'm

15:53

done with self-doubt I'm done with um shame I'm done with feeling weird about

16:01

being ambitious you know the list is long I don't we all know what it is I think for me the take away is oh we can

16:08

be done with that sooner than we thought we don't have to take

16:13

60 70 years to come to that conclusion what what have you applied

16:18

what are you done with well uh I'm done with

16:24

um I'm working on being done with self out I'm working on being done

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with shame and I'm working really hard on

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finding uh Joy finding Joy I like the way you paused and really

16:47

kind of thought about your wording CU you said I'm done with and then you said I'm working on being done with well I

16:55

haven't accomplished all of this yet I mean I'm still you know uh old habits

17:00

die hard and um I I have a stronger sense of

17:06

strength now than I did when I was 30 or 25 or but I feel like there's still room

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to grow I want to just note one more thing about your podcast which is that your

17:21

mom appears on the podcast and you've talked about going to therapy with her when you were 60 and

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she was 87 MH okay talk me through why she agreed to this because I've laid my differences

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with my mom who's 85 sort of aside I figure she's that age and she isn't

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going to change but maybe I'm thinking about this wrong um I went to therapy with my

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mother because she said something to me I it might have been my dad's birthday

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my dad who had passed and uh she was remembering that that it was his

17:59

birthday and she said something about I'm I'm sure you're thinking about your dad and I know there was stuff there

18:06

that I wish we'd been able to deal with or talk about when you were younger you know cuz my parents were

18:13

divorced um wish we could we' have had a chance to do that and I said oh well Mom

18:19

what's keeping us why don't we do it and so off we went and we did it and it it was very very helpful it's not like you

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know everything becomes perfect but that's not possible

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under any circumstances but it was an opportunity to communicate in a maybe a more honest

18:42

way and in a safe way that was helpful to both of us and I'm have no regrets

18:48

about it so if you're thinking about it with your mom and if you think your mother would be into it I encourage you

18:55

to do it because you might not have the opportunity in 10 years and you might

19:01

think oh if only did it heal things unresolved things did you see her

19:08

differently after that yes H I know I'm asking you a lot of

19:15

personal questions and because well I assume you're going to charge me after this I am

19:21

yeah but it's because you've been very open on your podcast I know huge

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mistake do you feel that well I know it's weird because I don't

19:32

know I don't really I I have it's I've never done anything like this I think it's s it sort of surprises me a little

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bit I'm incredibly private point of fact I mean I really am so it is sort of a strange thing but I also don't think

19:45

that I've I don't have any regrets about what I've shared on the podcast but it

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is New Territory for me but I don't know it's also good I I think it engenders a

19:56

way of thinking about community unication that might be good all right let's get out of the heavy stuff I want

20:03

to ask you about being funny so you've had these tent pole roles Seinfeld The

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New Adventures of Old Christine vep would you do another long running TV

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series are you open to that now yes I am I am what is it about that kind of

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episodic thing where you really develop a character over years that you like God

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it's so much fun you know if you get the right group of people people together it's like holy water it's so magnificent

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it's like a team sport it's it's team play and it just doesn't get better than

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that it's a lot it's a it's a treadmill though I will say you know I mean it is absolutely a treadmill and it's an

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enormous amount of work to keep doing that and keep up what is hopefully a

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level of Excellence over a long period of time so there are builtin

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challenges um so maybe a limited series might be a little more doable right now

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because to get locked into to an eight-year run on something might be a little it daunting but people aren't

21:11

doing that anymore anyway you know everything is much shorter lived it seems entertainment wise thinking about

21:17

Seinfeld and and just how things are made now could Seinfeld be made

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now probably not I mean what the hell's happening in network television anymore

21:27

I mean uh you know when Seinfeld was made it was really unlike anything that

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was on at the time it was a very different style of comedy and style of

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Storytelling and a different premise it was just a bunch of losers hanging out I mean it wasn't like a family or even a

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workplace comedy I'm not suggesting the other is bad I'm just saying it was very

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different so I would say one main reason it wouldn't be made now is because it's

21:58

hard to get anything different recognized and uh particularly nowadays

22:04

everyone's sort of Running Scared it seems you know although I will say actually I say this and then I will also

22:10

say that like at a24 where this movie is was made they are not scared of

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different are you worried about where Hollywood's at right now little bit mhm

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I am a little bit I hope I mean people need to be entertained people like to be entertained so it's not like I feel it's

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it's not going to disappear but it's going through a transition I don't know

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how it's going to end up so one of the things that I was thinking though when I was looking at

22:39

your characters on these long running series Selena Meyer on V elain on Seinfeld even Zora the character on

22:47

Tuesday they're often not very likable people is it fun to play people that act

22:52

in unsympathetic ways yeah

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it is I love that why because it's so interesting I don't know I like an

23:04

anti-hero i it's more it and also isn't that what people nobody's nothing is

23:09

pure nobody's pure uh everyone's makes horrible mistakes and fails and I think

23:17

that's more interesting and I think conflict is more interesting and I think

23:23

it's funnier when you say it's funnier obviously conflict is a great source of Comedy but I guess what I'm asking you

23:30

is that there is there an unlikable part of you that you bring and I'm just wondering

23:36

if I can't believe I just asked you that yeah wouldn't it be funny if as you said that like horns came up out of my head

23:42

and my tongue rolled out and it was like a a spiked

23:48

tongue um am I yes I am unlikable not that you're unlikable I

23:56

think you're lovely what I'm saying is is for example I think that and I am

24:02

quite proud of this I'm a pretty prickly person so I guess that's what I'm asking you know is is it because maybe you

24:08

think you're too nice in real life that you've drawn to these characters or maybe that's part of you too that you're a sort of maybe difficult person and you

24:14

are drawn to them because that kind of exemplifies something about yourself well I don't think I'm a

24:21

difficult person um I wonder what other people would say I am a an opinionated

24:27

person and I have strong opinions and strong

24:32

instincts and uh I think you're awful

24:39

Lulu thank you Julia you're a prickly is what you are um no but anyway I

24:47

really do I am not like these people I play but I am interested I guess in some

24:55

aspect of myself that like for example was Selena Meyer she was essentially two

25:01

years old and thought that the world revolved around her and any mistake she

25:07

made was simply not her own it was somebody else's and uh that's a fun ego

25:12

thing to tap into to not consider anyone else around you other

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than yourself and what does that mean what does that mean when somebody does

25:24

that it means they obviously they haven't been well nurtured that goes without saying but it's also an

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incredibly funny place to start with a

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character you know talking about vep it does make me wonder about how hard it is

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nowadays to be funny about politics and you are very political you

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even hosted the DNC in 2020 one of the things that people say that they like about Trump is that he's

25:52

funny and maybe they mean that he's entertaining and a shocking and irreverent way I'm looking at your face

26:00

you clearly don't think that he's funny no but one thing that people do say on

26:06

the other side about the Democratic party is that it's become too puritanical your former co-star Jerry

26:12

Seinfeld recently made news for talking about political correctness and comedy and so I'm just wondering as a famous

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comedian yourself what you think about that I think that if you look back on

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Comedy and drama let's say 30 years ago uh through the

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lens of today you might find bits and pieces that don't age

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well and I think to have antenna about sensitivities is not a bad thing and it

26:47

doesn't mean that all comedy goes out the window as a result when I hear people starting to complain about

26:54

political correctness and I understand why people might push back on it but to

27:01

me that's a red flag CU it sometimes it means something else I believe being

27:07

aware of certain sensitivities is not a bad thing that's

27:13

I don't know how else to say it are there things that no longer feel funny to you that once did or things that are

27:19

funny now that you didn't notice before

27:26

uh I know that that's a good question that's we're going to have to revisit that question because I don't know I

27:32

don't know quite how to answer it um well we are going to speak again you

27:39

know in our next session doctor uh we'll discuss it then because I'm not I'm not

27:44

sure I have to think about that I want to be thoughtful about [Music]

27:50

it after the break I called Julia back to get her answer to that last question

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and we also talk about taking big swings in comedy there's enormous risk look you're

28:02

going to fail you're going to fail in in in order to be very funny you have to take huge

28:07

risks and sometimes those risks really pay off and sometimes they truly do not

28:16

[Music]

28:32

hi this is Lulu well hello Lulu where are you what are you doing uh I'm in

28:37

Georgia right now I'm shooting the Marvel movie here ah we talked about the

28:43

Marvel movie so you're actually down there doing your thing I am indeed yeah

28:49

so um I was wondering if you'd been thinking about anything from our previous

28:56

conversation yeah I wanted to make sure that I answered this whole idea of

29:01

political correctness correctly and I can't really remember what I said so I

29:06

sort of wanted to go back to that and be sort of very clear about where I stand

29:12

my feeling about all of it is is that political correctness I mean in so far

29:18

as it equates to tolerance is obviously fantastic and of course I reserve the

29:23

right to boo anyone who says anything that offends me

29:28

while also you know respecting their right to free speech right but the bigger problem and the I think the true

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threat to Art and the creation of art is the consolidation of money and power and

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all this siloing of studios and outlets and streamers and Distributors I I don't

29:50

think it's good for the creative voice so that's what I want to say in terms of the threat to

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Art yeah yeah I mean I I was also thinking more about what you said and

30:02

having brought up Jerry Seinfeld and his comments about comedy and my intention wasn't to put you on the spot but more

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to understand how you think about risk-taking in comedy there's enormous

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risk look you're G to fail you're GNA fail in in in order to be very funny you

30:18

have to take huge risks and sometimes those risks really pay off and sometimes they truly do not

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and you have failed miserably um but

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that's the joy and the tragedy of doing

30:42

anything funny you said though that last time it wasn't a bad thing to have sensitivity

30:48

in comedy do you think it makes comedy better that people are now more tuned to

30:54

how some of their comments might be received I don't know if I can't judge

30:59

that if it's better or not I just know that you know the lens through which we create art today and I'm not going to

31:06

just specify it to Comedy I think it's also drama it's a different lens it

31:12

really is and I think you know like even classically wonderful indisputably great

31:19

films from the past are riddled with attitudes that today would not be

31:26

acceptable so I I think it's just good to be vigilant you know I even I was

31:32

thinking about this I thought well I mean like pretend this show your show the interview was being made 40 years ago I

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would posit that diversity would not be something you would be considering in terms of your the guest that you would

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bring to the show okay so that's interesting isn't it I mean things have shifted and in that

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case I would say things have shifted very much for the good and also actually

32:00

Lulu probably you wouldn't be the host I think Julia you're probably

32:05

right so I think um we have to sort of keep working to make it better wordss

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and all so what I was thinking about our previous conversation tell me was a

32:20

moment where I asked you about unlik ability and I was thinking that I used

32:26

the wrong word okay I was trying to get at was how I've always admired and this

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is the word that I would use now the sharp edges that you bring to your characters does that description ring a

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little bit more true to you yeah I don't play good girls I don't play girls that

32:47

behave a way that a good girl should behave or if they do they do it with

32:53

bitterness and anxiety so um I've played a lot lot of

32:58

characters who push back on the position that they're

33:06

in that are not content with their place

33:11

in the world and I would say that that's I mean women are having their rights taken away and um women are not

33:20

content and I play women like that do you think you're still trying to

33:25

prove yourself oh yeah really oh yeah like on in Tuesday on this movie coming

33:32

out you know that I'm certain nobody would have considered me for that role

33:38

20 years ago or something and and that's probably because you know they just thought of me only as you know a haha

33:46

funny person you know um we left our last call on a

33:51

question you wanted to think some more about so have you had any thoughts about

33:57

how your sense of humor has changed or not over the years

34:04

oh sorry I forgot to think about it

34:11

but I didn't do my homework oh my God Lulu I'm so sorry please please let me

34:19

pass please um I don't know I think I've my working

34:25

sense of humor that is to say what I bring to my performance I think that that's probably gotten better I've been

34:31

in the presence of so many people from whom through osmosis and watching them

34:37

work I have learned things about physical comedy about the Nuance of

34:42

comedy about the smallness of Comedy but there's always room to learn more and

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for me that is an incredibly joyful Adventure that's my like last minute of

34:56

procrastinating Cliff Noy

35:01

[Music] answer that's Julia Louie drus Tuesday

35:08

we'll be in theaters Nationwide starting June 14th this conversation was produced by Seth Kelly it was edited by Annabelle

35:15

bacon mixing by aim Shapiro original music by Dan Powell Diane Wong aliciaa

35:23

and Marian Lozano photography by Philip Montgomery our senior Booker is priia

35:28

Matthew and our producer is Wyatt orm our executive producer is Allison Benedict special thanks to Rory Walsh

35:36

renan belli Maddie masello Jake Silverstein Paula Schuman and Sam dolnick if you like what you're hearing

35:43

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35:49

conversations you can always go to NY times.com thein next week David maresi

35:56

talks with Serena Williams about life after tennis that had been my life for over 40

36:03

years and so it was like you don't go from literally a 40-year career to just

36:10

going okay what do you do today nothing I'm Lulu Garcia Navaro and this

36:16

is the interview from The New York Times [Music]

English (auto-generated)