

Hollywood Unscripted Ep 014 - Downhill

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Scott Tallal: Welcome to Hollywood UNSCRIPTED. I'm your host Scott Tallal, of The Malibu Film Society. And today we have Nat Faxon and Jim Rash, the co-writers, co-producers, co-directors of the new film Downhill, starring Will Ferrell and Julia Louis-Dreyfus. Welcome, gentlemen. Thank you. Thank you. Thanks for joining us. Yes. I guess the two of you met when you were in the Groundlings, correct?

Jim Rush: Yes.

Scott Tallal: Way back when. Take us from there

Nat Faxon: I was performing. And Jim was fawning and just said, who is that guy?

Jim Rush: Yeah, I screamed it during the show.

Nat Faxon: I need to work with him immediately.

Jim Rush: Or maybe I said I want to avoid him. I can't remember what it was.

Nat Faxon: That's true, I can't remember what it was

Jim Rush: We met at the Groundlings like ninety nine. Basically.

Nat Faxon: Yeah. We were coming up through this sort of class system. We were in the Sunday company together which is the level right before the main company and we started writing sketches and then we both subsequently got into the main company and continued to write silly bits with fake mustaches and wigs and just got along really well. You know, even through some of the bombs that we had onstage and some of those successes. Yeah. And just sort of formed a friendship.

Jim Rush: And that ended yesterday.

Nat Faxon: Yeah. Yeah.

Jim Rush: So we're just sitting beside each other.

Nat Faxon: You wouldn't take a selfie with me.

Jim Rush: We're barely in the same room right now, folks. We're not even in the same room.

Scott Tallal: What was it that made you decide that you did want to work together and that you had that chemistry?

Jim Rush: Man, I think, you know, when you go through the Groundlings and everyone writes with each other and stuff, but you do find people that you sort of clicked with on a sensibility level. And I think that we found an ease working together things that we were attracted to as far as material. And, you know, as actors, we started by just saying like, oh, we should write some for ourselves. And that's how it all began. And we dabbled into TV first and ultimately then we started talking about summer and talking about both from the East Coast. And you had destination vacations. And that led us to *The Way, Way Back*. And then ultimately that led us to *The Descendants*. So I think it just became one of those things where you made a deal with the devil. And now I don't know what to do about it.

Scott Tallal: Well, *The Way, Way Back* is probably one of the most charming movies of the teens. And there were so many amazing stars in it.

Jim Rush: Yeah, yeah. We lucked out.

Scott Tallal: How did that come to be?

Nat Faxon: It was a long, arduous journey.

Jim Rush: Not a surprise.

Nat Faxon: Not, yes. Not unlike probably many other Hollywood films. But I guess in our case, there were a lot of different directors that were coming aboard to direct it. And for various reasons they would sort of subsequently fall out, whether it be schedule or.

Jim Rush: Timeline for them when they could direct. And stuff like that.

Nat Faxon: Yes, exactly. So about six years went by of that process and we finally got the script back into our own hands and said, what if we did this on our own? And so we teamed with a friend of ours, Kevin Walsh, who was the producer on the film. And we just kind of did it. nitty gritty. Kind of grassroots where we decided to forego some of the formalities that sometimes Hollywood can thrust you into, such as giving it to an agent who then is supposed to give it to their client. And then you wait for months and you're not sure if anybody's read it. And, you know, you waste lots of time doing that. So we started with Allison Janney, who we knew, and she was the sort of first to the table and that's sort of got the ball rolling.

Jim Rush: We just decided to just use actors to attract other actors, basically. And yeah, there's a caliber of people that you'd like. Oh, my God. And so you create a party that you're inviting people to. And in the challenges obviously become money always. But we just lucked out that we were just building on that from her to Sam Rockwell, to Tony and ultimately to Steve Carell.

Scott Tallal: Do you try and create a party atmosphere on your sets when you're directing? Or is it a little bit more straightforward than that?

Jim Rush: Yeah. We had a keg, and we just, you know, everyone gathers around the keg.

Scott Tallal: Atmosphere on sets is always different. And every director or team of directors has a different atmosphere that they create a working environment.

Nat Faxon: Yes. I think because of our background coming from the Groundlings and that improv based performing a lot of the tenets, that the rules of improv are applicable to our relationship into the way we approach writing and directing, which is collaboration, listening, give and take and because we are drawn to comedy and doing bits with each other. It's sort of naturally lives in sort of a light, fun space. We take the approach of we are lucky to be doing this and why not have fun doing it?

Jim Rush: You know, we came to the table as actors probably first just out of the gates as far as our experience in Los Angeles and what we were going after. And so you have an experience of working on a variety of sets and you sort of take what you appreciate and what works for you and sort of make that your own.

Scott Tallal: How does that experience inform how you direct a movie?

Jim Rush: The acting part of it, yeah, obviously starting as actors. Obviously, we were writing a lot and those two things hand-in-hand, I think coming to the table, especially with *The Way Way Back*, having been first time directors, we knew that we needed to surround ourselves with great department heads and people with an expertise in their field because everyone's coming to the table looking to do the same thing, which is make this movie. So everyone is coming to the table wanting to show you what it is that they love doing, what they're talented at. What we wanted to come to the table with at the very beginning was a knowledge of ourselves as actors, how to allow an actor to explore something on their own. Guide them, offer suggestions. And also coming with a complete knowledge of the source material that we luckily with *Way Way Back* had written and understand just to create those two things. Those were our strengths coming into it. Then we surrounded ourselves with like John Bailey and.

Nat Faxon: Ann Roth.

Jim Rush: Ann Roth doing our costumes, which is insane. So I think it really is about taking what you can to the table. And then we were looking to learn and then take that stuff into our next feature.

Scott Tallal: I think when you're working together, it might be a little easier as writers because you can just bounce ideas off of each other. You can work on dialogue, you can work on scenes. But when it comes to division of responsibility as directors, that's a whole different ballgame.

Jim Rush: Yeah, yeah.

Nat Faxon: It's really about staying together and thinking as one voice and speaking as one voice and having one vision and the benefit of knowing each other for over 20 years and been through lots of experiences together, both positive and negative.

Jim Rush: And a lot of negative, lot of negative, things that Nat caused, you know, choices he made. and he said

Nat Faxon: That's how we balanced comedy and drama because Jim is constantly crying and I'm laughing at his crying and.

Jim Rush: Hanging out with us is like the perfect day for people because you go a little bit of both. But anyway, as far as Directors, because we're coming from the same place with the desire to learn and desire to experience this, and desire to make this movie happen. It really was about us sort of sharing responsibilities. In other words, just doing it together, because two brains are better in the sense that you can look at one. And if you fizzle out, there's somebody there who hopefully you can pick up the baton.

Nat Faxon: Hopefully.

Jim Rush: Hopefully.

Scott Tallal: I've also seen some people who work together as co-directors where one will do half the film and the other will do the other half.

Nat Faxon: I know I don't know how that works, but of that works. We don't operate that way. We sort of are attached at the hip for most of the shoot. For now. For now.

Scott Tallal: OK, you to straighten out or I'm going to turn this podcast right around. We're going to go home.

Jim Rush: OK, great. Understood. Understood. Sorry.

Scott Tallal: Obviously, Downhill is inspired by the Swedish original movie Force Majeure. Talk to us about the challenges of adaptation when you take a foreign film. Your audience is gonna be very different.

Jim Rush: Yeah.

Scott Tallal: Talk to us about the process of what you decided to keep, what you decided to leave out, what you decided to change.

Jim Rush: I'll start by saying specifically speaking only for taking Force Mature to the Downhill of it all adaptations the benefit and the wonderful beating heart of Force Majeure in a way is that it feels like there's this play hovering inside of it. Both Force Majeure and Downhill subsequently have this sort of key scene, which in ours is like eleven pages, which is Pete and Billy going at each other in a hotel suite in front of relative strangers. So that in and of itself feels like a play and Force Majeure and Downhill or about an insane incident and a couple sort of grappling with the aftermath of that and whether their hearts can navigate their way back to each other. So just like a play, you sort of approach something and say like a play's been redone with different cast that changes things. You can change tone. You can approach it with different ways. You can stage it differently. It can be a full set or minimalist. So there's a way for us to sort of like tackle each thing. As far as Force Majeure for us, we knew that we were obviously putting Americans in Europe. That changes stuff. There's a fish out of water element that needs to be addressed and have fun with. Americans are very different than Swedish couple in just the way they approach, you know, maybe there's a more verbal maybe they go to safety to complain. That's probably very American. But

without losing what we loved about Force Majeure, which is the awkwardness, the cringe, the silences, the flawed characters, those are the things that you wanted to preserve. So we knew it was about preserving that spirit. Tonally, it's gonna be different and approach it in that way.

Nat Faxon: There's always a point too, I think in any adaptation where your love for the original or source material, you have to sort of let go a little bit and release it and create your own project. I remember that happening with The Descendants when we're doing that with Alexander. And we on our first few drafts were very faithful to the novel. And there was a point where we sat down with Alexander and Jim Burke and Jim Taylor, and they sort of advised us to let go a little bit and put ourselves into it and create something new. And a similar thing happened with Force Majeure. We benefited because Jesse Armstrong, who is an incredible writer, was first in on this. So he did a lot of the heavy lifting early on. And then by the time we got our hands on it. It was just like Jim said, preserving the things that we loved about the original, but allowing ourselves to.

Jim Rush: Know that two characters are experiencing the same thing. And that's going to be different.

Nat Faxon: Yeah. So we sort of delved into a little bit more of Julia's character than the original did. We wanted to sort of muddy the water. We were preserving the male cowardice aspect of Force Majeure, but also adding a female perspective and how it influenced her as much as it does him.

Scott Tallal: Now, Ruben Ostlund, who created the original film, he was AP on this. Did he play a day to day role other than that?

Jim Rush: Not a day to day role, no.

Nat Faxon: No. He was very supportive of our adaptation of his film. But he, I think, was busy doing another project and allowed us to kind of create our own version of it.

Scott Tallal: Talk to us about the challenge of for lack of a better term black comedy for a movie like this. How do you balance I mean, when do you go for funny versus when you go for dark?

Jim Rush: I think that's through the whole process from writing to shooting and into the edit to sort of experiment with how far you can go with either way, going back to that middle scene, everything sort of. So live and breathe in that middle eleven page beating heart of a scene. And that's been driven by probably the drama they're facing. What hurts the most for them? That's the best place to find it, because I think comedy that comes out of almost a release or a drama that gift's you with comedy, much like we experienced. When we have something tragic, you know, we go home for a funeral or something. There's this sense that people need to find some levity, whether it's in reminiscing, whether it's in storytelling or when we tell the story of something that happened to us that was insane. And then the moment was either dramatic or shocking or whatever. Years later, two months later, a day later, we're telling that story completely different. So I think for us, we knew that we have this very dramatic stuff. So it was important that anything it was born out of that came from the awkwardness, came from a line, came from relief.

Nat Faxon: Yeah. I think you're constantly calibrating and you don't always know in the moment how far to go and where the boundaries are. Like Jim said, it's a lot of experimentation and letting the comedy be born out of that drama so that it feels authentic and honest. We experience that a little bit with *The Way Way Back* where we had sort of two different worlds. We had the drama that was going on in the house and the suffocation and the isolation of our oz like kid. And then we had this larger than life waterpark and it was blending those two worlds and make sure they fit in the same movie. And this is not so dissimilar in the sense that you have their own experiences, these two people and they go on their own separate days and have these exciting things happen to them, but it does have to sort of fit in the fabric of the rest of the movie. And luckily we shot a lot and we had a lot of editing time to sort of make sure.

Jim Rush: We put scenes in and remove scenes.

Nat Faxon: Yes, but it is a little bit of a trial and error, as you know. You don't always know. Sometimes those broader moments actually work and give you a little relief from the drama. And sometimes they skew too much and you realize it doesn't fit.

Scott Tallal: That raises an interesting question because you keep referring back to the heart of the movie, that eleven page scene, and that's as dramatic and as deep as it gets between married couples sometimes. And when you have that and then you're trying to work in the comedy, you have a choice on the comedy. You can go very real on the comedy or you can go broad. You can go over the top. And certainly some of the characters that you introduced in this movie tended towards the latter. What was behind that decision?

Jim Rush: Well, to the first part, yes, you have Zach and Rosie sitting there and that represents us, which allows the comedy to sort of present itself within that scene because they're as uncomfortable as we are. So I think a lot of our comedy comes from just the very reactions they're having to this moment. And Zach attempting to put the fire out a little bit and try to make it better. As far as like I assume you're talking to like Charlotte. All right. Otto's character and Guillermo, a ski instructor as well in Rosie, for that matter. They function, especially Charlotte, as sort of this great European hovering just over the ground. There's a toe sticking there, coming from a different point of view. And we really wanted something that was in Billy's face, you know, in other words, she and Guillermo and Rosie all pose the same question in different ways, which is basically Billy facing is she taking care of herself? Is she allowing it to be about her? Is she letting go too much of herself? And Rosie's saying, obviously, Rosie's point of view about black and white. And Billy knows it's not black and white, but it's important for her to come in contact with these. And I think being able to have a couple of characters like Allison Janney, we always loved and Way, Way Back she hovers a little bit just over the ground. And when you have actresses like Miranda Otto and Allison Janney for that fact, to know how to play this delicate line between a character and being grounded, that's the magic that you're looking for.

Scott Tallal: That 11 page scene must have been somewhat painful to write.

Jim Rush: I guess if you enjoy pain, I think it's a blast, actually. I mean, I think, you know, again, Force Majeure gifts you with that moment in the sense that the words change and the circumstance and the characters and some of the beats. But again, starting with, Jesse started to tackle it and then it just sort of expands and it becomes juicier and juicier as you just keep adding layers. And for Julia to be able to go in there and go in angry and then go through sorrow and then just be infuriated by it and then make a terrible choice as a mother to put her kids as pawns in a game that she did not want to be a part of. You can't ask for a more fun scene to both write and be a part of.

Scott Tallal: But I would think that in the process of writing that there's got to be a lot of new insights that you find into yourself.

Jim Rush: Yes, I came to realize that I just enjoyed writing stuff for Julia because I feel like I'm just putting my words into her.

Nat Faxon: And I was will,.

Jim Rush: Because I say, boom a lot. Boom.

Nat Faxon: And I say stuff like, like, you can't run in ski boots.

Jim Rush: Yes. Classic

Scott Tallal: As a viewer, having seen it makes me think about my own life and about how I deal with things like that.

Jim Rush: Yes, yes. Yes.

Nat Faxon: It's all the poor choices that you make. I think that's one of the wonderful things about that scene, is that you identify a lot of yourself in there.

Jim Rush: Yes.

Nat Faxon: Help to end how you at times just make the terrible choice of doubling down on your defense and letting your ego and your selfishness kind of get in the way of practicality or an apology or admittance, you know, a way out of this whole thing. But instead, you stubbornly deny that..

Jim Rush: no one wants to be the villain

Nat Faxon: You know, that tension is what makes the scene so wonderful.

Jim Rush: And Zach actually said this so I'm stealing sort of his thoughts about I'll say Americans for this point, but he's talked to a lot about how when we're presented in front of someone, we say, oh, we're fine, we're great. How about you? and we shift the focus. Here's the thing where they aired it, something that none of us want to do in front of two people, which is say how we really are right now and to have this moment that because Billy is uncorked and has put up with enough and to air this what we call dirty laundry in front of them to expose his vulnerabilities, to bring our kids out is something that we all try to avoid in our lives. You know, just to say, great, how are you? And don't speak our truth. So that's another enjoyment here.

Promo - HU: Hi, this is Jenny Curtis, producer of Hollywood UNSCRIPTED. We hope the show is igniting your passion as much as it is ours. Please subscribe, rate us and leave a review. It really does matter as we bring you more inspiring conversations with the filmmakers you admire. Now back to the show.

Scott Tallal: You famously did or semi-famously did the writers room on Sundance TV, which was for a film...

Jim Rush: Thank you. Very famous for that. I was very famous for that

Nat Faxon: I don't think anybody saw that.

Scott Tallal: Well, being a film lover. I highly recommend film lovers to look it up. It was wonderful. Every week to be able to sit in a room and hear from the guys who wrote Game of Thrones or something like that was. What did you learn from that? As a writer,.

Jim Rush: A number of things. You as a writer, A. you're looking for, is this just me or is this incredibly hard? You know, because it is, it can be incredibly hard and can be incredibly fruitful. And so to be able to listen to other people that you admire and you think this comes easy for them, for them to say, oh, no, we grapple with this. Like to listen to the Breaking Bad group telling me that they had written themselves into a corner. And so they spent a day or beyond just trying to figure out how to get Bryan Cranston's character to safety. They had like assistance going online, trying to find out how can he survive this moment. And you realize that as a group, they thought they were going the right direction. They got to a wall and then they had to get themselves out of it. So I think just knowing that to be able as a writer, write one paragraph in a day, you should remind yourself how successful of a day that was. It's very easy to go like I only wrote a paragraph or something, but just to move a few words is a successful day. So I thought it was almost like therapy for me.

Scott Tallal: How do you guys deal with conflict when you have two opposing ideas, whether it's a script or directing, whatever? How do you deal with it? How do you resolve it?

Jim Rush: Here we go. I want you to start and see what you say.

Nat Faxon: What do you think happens? I relent and then we

Jim Rush: that's what I say, once one of us is right.

Nat Faxon: Yeah. You say I'm right and I say, fine, we'll do it your way.

Jim Rush: It depends on what we're approaching. I think for the most part, yes, we'd have disagreements on set. It's impossible not to. Hopefully we do it in the privacy of behind a monitor together. But I think if one of us feels strongly about something, it's

about allowing that person to walk over and give that note or make that suggestion or try that camera or get that extra footage, because they'd be foolish not to do it, because the spirit of it is let's get one more, let's get everything we can to be in that edit room and tell the story as best as possible, because we just don't know. And if we had the time, let's take it. I do think in writing sometimes all partners have to walk away and I mean that in a positive way. I think that you can get to a place and you say, let's just step away from it and then look at it with fresh eyes or let me take a crack at it. Let me just get something on paper and come back and we'll fix this and make it better,.

Nat Faxon: Which is always my cue to go take a nap.

Jim Rush: Yes, absolutely. Why don't you go home and take care of your family. I remember Alexander. We walked in. We first started working on The Descendants meeting Alexander and his writing partner, Jim Taylor. We walked into their office and their monitor. They had two desks that were up against each other with their computer screens facing themselves. So that two computer screens, basically, it was the wall between them and they typed together. So they were using these programs like they would use in a writer's room where we could see up on the screen. And they were typing. And so one's just watching you type a sentence. And then I guess one of them has the choice to delete that sentence while you write a new one.

Nat Faxon: We tried it and that's all that happened.

Jim Rush: No. There was no way, no way that was ever gonna be. But it works for them, obviously, because they've written amazing things together. But I think everyone has their own process.

Scott Tallal: These are things that I've been announced in the trade. I don't know if they're still in process. For instance, you mentioned Allison Janney and Sam Rockwell. It was announced that you were going to be working on The Heart with them. Is that happening?

Jim Rush: I'm going to say it's happening because I'm putting it in the universe. But we have been wanting to make that. And so we're getting to that line where it looks like it will happen.

Scott Tallal: You wrote it in 2013?

Jim Rush: Oh yeah, it's been around forever.

Nat Faxon: Yeah it's been a long time.

Jim Rush: Much like anything, it gets close, then things happen. So.

Nat Faxon: And you ultimately are looking for a partner that's willing to take a chance. It is an original script in every sense, sort of an action comedy. But it's dark. We are always huge fans of the Coen Brothers and *Raising Arizona* is one of our favorite films. So it sort of fits a little bit in that genre, but it's something that I think a lot of places we're like, oh, we love that script. We can't wait to see it, but they're not necessarily willing to take the chance of putting it up on its feet. So it's just a matter of finding the right coming together partner. But we have assembled a terrific cast to play the roles. Now, it's just about getting the opportunity to do it.

Scott Tallal: Because the storyline sounds really off the wall.

Jim Rush: It is.

Nat Faxon: Areas. It's quite off the wall,.

Jim Rush: Basically on the black market organ trade. Yes.

Nat Faxon: Yes.

Jim Rush: Hilarious

Scott Tallal: And people who try to do right by it.

Nat Faxon: Yes.

Jim Rush: They try to right by it. Exactly. Exactly. So we'll see. Our fingers are crossed that hopefully that's something that can happen in the next year.

Scott Tallal: And what about Batso and the Wall?

Jim Rush: The writer is working on that right now. And so he's off and running.

Scott Tallal: That also just deals with a bunch of quirky characters. And Batso was the guy who was the first to scale the face of El Capitan in Yosemite.

Nat Faxon: Yes. I think what was so alluring about that story really was there was one piece that sort of did it for us, which is that he was this gregarious, kind of larger than life figure and kind of.

Jim Rush: No fear,

Nat Faxon: No fear, talk a big game and had a very likeable personality. But he would make a lot of poor choices. Which is something that we're drawn to and one was just to scale one of the most impossible faces there is in climbing. And then he gets the top after this incredible feat and hides behind a rock and just starts bawling. And that was the piece, I think, that drew us in.

Jim Rush: Yes. You get a window into someone's true self and what they try to hide from you. That's pretty special.

Scott Tallal: I want to go a little bit deeper on a question that we asked earlier, because I'm wondering, being an actor, does that background, do you feel that makes you a better writer?

Jim Rush: Being an actor make you a better writer.

Nat Faxon: It's hard to say. I think certainly we tend to write visually, which may have something to do with our acting background. You know, we're always maybe putting things in scripts that we as actors would love the opportunity to do. This 11 page scene in Downhill is an example of that. Rarely do you get of scene that is that long and meaty and emotional to play. So I think maybe subconsciously those things get infused into the writing because you're wanting those moments for yourself.

Jim Rush: It's hard to say when you asked that. And I'm thinking about all my writer friends who I just would say I'm super jealous of who have no desire to act. And then I read their stuff and I'm like, I don't know. You know, I think a writer, actor, whoever you are, writer, director, writer, actor or just writer, any of that. I think it really comes down to a desire to know why people are the way they are to embrace the flaws and people to embrace sometimes saying less. I think the first, at least for me, I can only speak for me, but when I would write sketches at the Groundlings at the beginning, it was very verbal and lots.

Nat Faxon: When did that stop.

Jim Rush: It hasn't.

Nat Faxon: I don't remember that stopping.

Jim Rush: I didn't ask you to chime in at this point, but I remembered as I started to teach at the Groundlings and think about all my teachers who told me how much will reward there is in just behavior, whether in just silence and observing people. I think when you start to really understand that, that we are much less verbal than we perceive ourselves to be, that we say so much more. I mean our reactions. Anyway, that's a long winded way of saying that. I think it's just a desire to really mine characters. And I think that that makes for a great writer.

Nat Faxon: Can you see my reaction? I'm saying so much with it. Yeah. Give me a break.

Jim Rush: Have you guys seen Nat act? Because I just want to say that, I'll let you interpret it. It's fantastic.

Scott Tallal: As far as acting is concerned, you've both done so much, some together on shows like Slackers.

Jim Rush: Yeah, we were in that together,.

Scott Tallal: But also separately that you've done a lot separately, including voice work. Are there any that really stand out?

Nat Faxon: I've been fortunate to be in a lot of really fun, silly projects, both in TV and in film. I was in Beer Fest and Club Dread from the Broken Lizard Group and they turned out to be fast friends. They are a great bunch of guys who went to Colgate together. I went to Hamilton College, which was just down the road, but we got along right from the moment we met. And just one of those experiences where you're having a lot of fun getting to do something that you really enjoy, but also just kind of having a blast doing it. So I've been the beneficiary of their movies and then other TV projects such as Married and Ben and Kate and most recently Friends from College. And I think one of the things that I've at least taken from those experiences into the projects that Jim and I are a part of are just remembering that we are lucky to be doing what we're doing and we're getting paid to do it. So have fun in the experience and work with good people. There are enough stresses when you're on set and certainly as directors you're answering a thousand questions a minute that you don't always have the answer for. So you might as well be surrounded by people that are good people that are void of some of the trappings and drama that this industry can create. And it just makes for just a better time. So we've incorporated that into our casting. Certainly when we're talking about people and if you hear some stories about someone, then we may steer clear and just go a different direction, basically, because we want to have a good time when we're making these projects.

Scott Tallal: And Jim, I know that you guys were also both on Reno 911.

Jim Rush: Yes.

Scott Tallal: You've done everything from One Hour Photo with, what was it, the amateur porn guy?

Jim Rush: Yes. Amateur porn guy. still amateur and still take photos.

Scott Tallal: You were Captain America Civil War. That 70's Show and the final episode of Friends.

Jim Rush: Yes, I was in the final episode of Friends. That was kind of big just because I when I remember when I ride to L.A. Like Friends was big and ER was big. And so in my head, as I got kind of an audition for that and I remember I had an audition for Friends earlier in the last season to be on a game show with Matt LeBlanc's character Joey. And I didn't get the part. And so I thought, you know, whatever, at least I went in. And then it was final season and then it was down to the last episode and got another audition. And I thought, well, this is it, Jim. You've got one shot or you'll never be on Friends. I just lucked out and got to be the guy on the plane that basically gets Jennifer Aniston off the plane with the phalanges. And it was incredible experiences because it taught me a lot about the journey you can take with the show because I was a voyeur to them having a very emotional ending to spend 10 years with each other. And so I kept my distance just obviously because they're going through whatever. And also they would only give you the page for your scenes. Obviously, they were keeping lockdown of the whole script and everything. And the big reveals, which I won't spoil it here in case people didn't see it. But yeah it was an incredible experience, you know, and I think as an actor that and then obviously, I think for me, the biggest gift I had was Community, just because the longest job I had, which was like six years. And over that six years, we went through The Descendents and the Way, Way Back. So I was both getting to act and also have all of this stuff happen at the same time. And, you know, very grateful for that.

Scott Tallal: Given that on this film you co-produced, you co-wrote, you co-directed, of those different roles do they all scratch the same itch or is there one that you really love more than the others?

Nat Faxon: I started in this industry as an actor. It is not something I do in this film, but in others and TV shows. I enjoy it probably the most.

Scott Tallal: Why?

Nat Faxon: I think because it's the easiest as it comes to me. And people pamper you and they tell you need to be somewhere and you walk with them to that location and you get a lot of attention. And sadly, I need that. However, I will say that I think directing has proven to be more rewarding personally. When we got the response that we did at Sundance for *The Way, Way Back*, that was probably one of the biggest highlights of my life. It was so fulfilling. I felt like we had put so much of our sweat and tears and effort into making that happen. And after eight to 10 years, it finally did and we did it ourselves as opposed to having someone else do it. So it felt the most gratifying. Probably more than any other acting job I've ever had. So.

Scott Tallal: And it was the first time.

Nat Faxon: And it was the first time.

Scott Tallal: First time directing.

Nat Faxon: Exactly. So I love acting and I enjoy doing it because it's fun and it's always unique and it's with a different group of people. However, I think directing can be a lot harder, but therefore a lot more rewarding as a result.

Jim Rush: Yes, it's a difficult question because I think you're right. There are different itches and satisfying something. *The Way, Way Back* encapsulated all of it to write and direct and then play these small parts, which I actually fought, like I was nervous about

putting that extra pressure. I would say that I put writing first only in the sense that it's probably the hardest of those, for me personally only, and I mean that by time, time alone, time with him. We've obviously both written separately for other things. So what I love about it, whether it's for me or watching in this case, Julian Will, to be some small part of that. And to watch them being alive and take it from the page to something different is very rewarding to me. Directing for me is most exciting. This is the newest of the three, for us and I'm excited to learn from that. So I would put writing first just because I enjoy the herculean task of breaking your brain to the point of putting something on paper that you hope becomes something special. Then would I put directing just because again, like crafting that and it's something that seems exciting and new and I want to get better at it and I want to learn more and I want to absorb more. And of course, I love to entertain and act. But if you're forcing us to put it in order, that's what I would do.

Nat Faxon: And that's probably from best to worst too, right?

Jim Rush: What I'm best at to worst? So I've gotten a letter from Faxon, I need to stop.

Scott Tallal: Jim Rash, Nat Faxon. The movie is Down Hill, it opens Valentine's Day weekend. Thank you so much for joining us. Best of luck.

Jim Rush: Thank you so much.

Nat Faxon: Thanks for having us.

Ammouncer: Hollywood Unscripted is created by Curtco Media and presented in cooperation with the Malibu Film Society. This episode was hosted by Scott Tallal with guests Nat Faxon and Jim Rash, produced and edited by Jenny Curtis. Sound Engineering by Michael Kennedy. The score from Downhill featured as the music in this episode was composed by Volker Bertelmann and provided courtesy of Searchlight Pictures. The executive producer of Hollywood Unscripted is Stuart Holperin. The Hollywood unscripted theme song is by Celeste and Erik Dick. Please rate, review and

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