>> Delbert Whetter: Hello everyone, my name is Delbert Whetter, and I am a member of the board of directors at RespectAbility, a nonprofit organization fighting stigma and advancing opportunities, so people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of the community. I'd like to describe my appearance. I am a white male. My hair is a mixture of blond and gray, but the gray is now in a battle with the blond and appears to be winning. I'm wearing a blue shirt and to let you know, we have live interpretation as well as closed captioning. If you click the CC at the bottom of the screen, you can see the captioning there or also there will be the link posted into the chat. I would like to thank the Sundance Film Festival and RespectAbility for making this event possible. There is also another panel, other panels taking place as part of the RespectAbility, Accessibility and Inclusion Conversation Series at Sundance Film Festival. Tomorrow, there will be a panel called Mentorships Matter with an amazing panel full of valuable information. It has been a challenging and frightening time for many of us with the threat of the pandemic all around us. However, there have been some unexpected silver linings. Thanks to the Sundance Film Festival, with this film festival being online, closed captioning and audio description is available, which makes this the most accessible Sundance Film Festival in history. Sundance has made it clear that this is only the beginning and that's extremely exciting because it gives us all hope for the future of accessibility. And now I would like to recognize all of those people in the disability community and disability community advocates, and disability justice community and they have made the focus of their lives to make film accessible for all. So, thank you to all of those people. Yes, it's the right thing to do, but it's also business-minded because the disabled buying power is over $1 billion. It's an over $1 billion industry. So folks with disabilities are a $1 trillion industry and many people in Hollywood realize that disabled people belong at the table and deserve to be included. Diversity must include disability. Our panel today is concentrating on one area of the disability experience in Hollywood. How to produce deaf stories with deaf actors. And I would like to start by introducing someone. Now, I've known and worked with this person for over 40 years and that may seem like a long time. And if so, you're right. My filmmaking partner, Jevon Whetter is also my older brother. We first partnered on a film and entertainment project at the age of eight. Jevon trained at the AFI, the American Film Institute and he earned his MFA degree in the producing program. And also at San Diego State University, he earned a master's degree in theater and he teaches deaf theater as well at California State Northridge. Jevon wrote a feature film script called "Flash Before the Bang", based on a true story about an all-deaf high school track team at the State School for the Deaf in Oregon, led by a deaf coach. And the deaf coach will be played by Troy Kotsur, who happens to be one of our panelists today. This film project is based on a true story where the all-deaf team overcame adversity and discrimination and won a seemingly impossible state champion in 1986, in track and field in the state of Oregon. And this script has earned recognition from several important organizations, such as Film Independent, PGA, the Producers Organization of America, San Francisco Film, and the WGA, the Writer's Guild of America. And before I hand over the paddle to Jevon and his more than capable hands, I would like to say happy birthday to our mother, Judith Whetter, who's watching our panel from home today. And here's Jevon Whetter.

>> Jevon Whetter: Hello everyone. Thank you Del, thank you so much. Happy birthday, mom. Okay, so welcome everyone to our amazing panel. I'll describe myself a little bit. My name is Jevon Whetter. I am light-skinned with red hair, which is short now, I wear glasses and I'm a deaf man with a gray button-up shirt. So, I want to welcome everyone to the panel, specifically and purposely I wanted to just highlight some of the events of the panelists their bios, in-depth performance attributions. So you might be wondering if so, you know the people who are behind the camera, like an ASL coach, a director, a producer, a writer, the crew. So this is what we're going to focus on today during this panel and we have a well-qualified panel of deaf professionals, who are filmmakers. So, we couldn't invite everyone, but today we do have a great panel. So I'd like for all the panelists to please show up now, please, and describe yourselves. Hello panelists, great, good to see you. See now, if all of you could please describe yourself, starting with CJ Jones.

>> CJ Jones: Hello everybody. My name is CJ Jones. I'm an African-American. I have thinning hair. I'm wearing a light blue shirt and a black jacket, so I'm so stylish for today. So, I've been performing almost all my life and I became immersed in film and in theater and giving onstage performances for more than 40 years. So, I have so much to share and I'll just keep my comments short for the next individual.

>> Troy Kotsur: Hi everyone. I have a black shirt that's long sleeve. I'm wearing a Jeff cap, I have glasses and a little bit of gray around my facial hair. I didn't have any time to shave today. So don't yell at me about that, but I'm here. I'm white, I'm deaf, and my voice interpreter is Joshua. You'll hear him speaking for me. I've been involved in show business, directing, acting, sign language consultant, many different roles over the past 30 years. Thank you so much for having me as part of this panel.

>> Jevon Whetter: Anne.

>> Anne Tomasetti: Hello everyone. I am Anne Tomasetti. I am a white female, I have brown hair that's very long, very long. It's been growing a lot during the pandemic. And my voice for today is Heather Rossi, she'll be voicing for me. I am so excited to be here with you all. Thank you for having me.

>> Jevon Whetter: Okay, this is Jevon speaking. Today, my voice interpreter is Andrew Leyva, and so I want to thank him and all the interpreters who are voicing for each actor and voice is being provided for all of our panelists, CJ?

>> CJ Jones: Yes, yes, I forgot to include my interpreter, Gary Greco. He will be my interpreter for today, thank you.

>> Jevon Whetter: Now before, this is Jevon speaking, before we get started I'm going to give a short bio about every one of our panelists. Now CJ has been working in the industry for over 40 years. He's a motivational speaker, director, actor, comic. I mean, he's done it all. He's been through all parts of this industry. And most recently he appeared in sweet "Baby Driver", you've seen "Castle Rock" on Hulu. He's also done open "Door into the Woods". TV shows, he's done "The Closer" and he's also been a deaf writer-producer, and we also work with Joshua. So CJ has recently just appeared in the sequels for "Avatar" which we're very excited to look forward to seeing his work there. He was recognized, yes, please applause for them. And CJ was recognized in 2018, he received the SAG-AFTRA Harold Russell Award by Media Access Awards which is very impressive, based on all of his experience. It's an honor to have CJ Jones here. Yes, yes, CJ, applause for CJ Jones. Next, I'd like to introduce Troy. Troy has been in this industry for a long, long time. His background is NAD or National Association for the Deaf, days where he's worked is directing and on stage and on film. And now he's at Sundance working on a movie that we might've seen here called "Coda", and congratulations to Troy. He actually broke a record for distribution which is an applause that we should recognize. Certainly we're very proud of him and his accomplishments.

>> Troy Kotsur: Thank you.

>> Jevon Whetter: And also, you know, there are a lot of things that Troy has accomplished in his work. He's now presently in "The Mandalorian" where he created his own sign language for the character called Tuskan Raiders Sign Language. He's also been featured in "Criminal Minds", in "Scrubs" and "CSI: New York", "Sue Thomas: F.B.Eye" among other projects. And also "The Number 23" film projects that he's been involved with is "The Number 23", "Wild Prairie Rose", "Universal Signs" and a lot, lot more. So we'd like to welcome Troy Kotsur to the panel.

>> Troy Kotsur: Thank you.

>> Jevon Whetter: And now we have Anne Tomasetti, and as an actor, a TV stage film director of ASL or DASL, she's also a certified deaf interpreter, a CDI, she's a consultant on ASL coach, an interpreter for theater, and an instructor. She's also is very valued in her work that she did as an ASL coach for "Coda". She got to partner up with other people to work with as a team. Alexandria Wailes was also somebody that she got to work with, which is also \*\*quite, I mean that's amazing to have them both work together but not only that, she's also been involved in "Shakespeare in The Park" in New York, she's done off-Broadway presentations and production, Broadway productions, and a consultant for the "Crip Camp". on Netflix, so welcome Anne, yes, yes, welcome Anne.

>> Anne Tomasetti: Thank you so much.

>> Jevon Whetter: Okay, has the interpreters caught up, are we good? Okay, so now we're going to start with the discussion we're here for. So, the first question that I have for our panelists and CJ may, you might want to answer this, tell us, you know if you had a producer who had never worked with deaf performance before, what is it that you think best influences that process? What must be done first? Do you want, if you want a deaf talent on the show what is it that you're supposed to do? Or what have producers done?

>> CJ Jones: All right, I'll jump in. So, based on my years of experience in working in the industry, I've found that it's really important to educate the producer about our culture, about ASL and really establish that transparency and communication and navigate that, what's to be successful and cause awareness, looking at the material to read, looking at the roles that deaf actors will play. You know, this isn't just the first time but really just sharing that deaf talent is out there and making them feel comfortable working with deaf individuals. You know, in the film "Baby Driver", the director Edgar Wright, I taught him while we were filming. I taught him without the use of an interpreter, how to communicate. And he realized at that time that it was challenging but at the same time, I wanted him to see the authenticity of the actor, of the deaf individual, writing, be a gesture, jotting down notes. And that was one of the reasons why he selected me and casted me over thousands of candidates auditioning, because I was so authentic in my role. So, it's so important that the director and the producer be made to feel comfortable by dialoguing before coming on to the set, that is just so critical.

>> Jevon Whetter: Just want to, Jevon, just add, I just want to make sure that the interpreter has caught up, okay Troy.

>> Troy Kotsur: This is Troy. I'd also like to add about producing, you know, with my experience working with "Star Wars" and the show, "The Mandalorian", you know, I somehow was contacted and I wondered how they found me. It just one of the employees happened to know sign language, they were studying it. And the producer asked them, they said, "You know, we want to create a sort of sign language "or gestural communication." They said, "Well, you really should find a deaf person." And when they reached out, they found me and it was a great opportunity for them to have more of an open mind to demonstrate that, you know, we had this shared language that makes it better for the show. And it's very important for the crew to know some American Sign language, right? That's really important, to increase awareness and sensitivity, and it made the show very successful. - Jevon Whetter: Anne.

>> Anne Tomasetti: And I'll add onto what Troy and CJ have said. I have found that when people want to work with deaf actors and they want to have deaf stories and deaf writers and producers and directors, I noticed that they choose to enter our deaf world, right, and to enter our deaf stories or they support other deaf people, and we should support other deaf producers as well. So, really the best approach is to just dive deep into their world and to set aside all of their biases and all their privileges, because what we experience and what we see just won't become your experience. And so it's important to have an open mind then, to really just get right in there and to go through it together, and that's the best way is to just go through it.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. I just want to make sure that there was interpreters caught up.

>> Troy Kotsur: Flip a coin.

>> Jevon Whetter: Troy, go ahead, and then CJ.

>> Troy Kotsur: What I did on the set for "Coda", there was a director, her name is Sian Heder, and she did her homework, she did her due diligence. She really immersed herself in deaf culture and became much more sensitive and more respectful of our culture, and I think that's part of what made this movie successful. It's really important that a director takes their time and do the research and not just bring in an interpreter and rely on them to really be a full fledged part. And that makes the show better, if you understand deaf culture. And it's just been an amazing experience because she did that.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Okay, go ahead CJ.

>> CJ Jones: Yes, this is CJ. I'm very glad that Troy brought this up. Producers and directors must, and I mean must do the research and not do a half-ass job in this because if you do the research and you learn, you become more sensitive, more aware, flexible and more creative, to allow the deaf actor to really express themselves in their authenticity in terms of what the director wants or what they may not want, but they allow that flexibility and change to take place. Once that occurs, then trust will happen. So, it's so important and paramount that directors and producers do study the language of ASL, the deaf culture, and all that's included.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. I just want to make sure we catch up with the interpreters, sorry (indistinct). I just wanted to add that many people are aware that deaf performers in the community are very strong in the entertainment system, they have a lot of breakup, a lot of experience in the stage. And there's a long history of work that deaf talent have done to the stage. And some people saying, "Well, there may not "be very talented people out there," but that's not true. There are a whole plethora of deaf talent that exists out there, they're just waiting to be discovered. So yes, try and make that transition of, you know, you have those deaf talent that are in the theater world who want to move into the film world and they just need to be able to find those references. So there are people there, there are people in the deaf community who are willing to be those consultants as needed. I see that Troy raised their hand. Troy, did you want to say anything, add anything?

>> Troy Kotsur: Actually, you go ahead.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon, okay great. So now I want to move to the topic of, let's see I'm just going to get, okay CJ, let me address this to you or anyone in the panel. So, Troy had just mentioned doing research by directors. So let's suppose that a director or a producer knows nothing about how to communicate with deaf people, how work with deaf people. So what are your suggestions that should be done with a deaf consultant? You know, like to teach about their culture, to give that advice before the development of the script or do you think that can happen during the script and then make the modifications as needed? Anyone in the panel can answer that question. Troy.

>> Troy Kotsur: This is Troy. When I worked on "The Mandalorian" show for "Star Wars", it was the third year of that series. And they were trying to figure out what to call my position because it was never on the SAG list or on unions or anything out there. You know, you've got producer, director, writer and actor and all of that, but sign language consultant was never there. So, it was a little bit awkward there thinking "What should I call you?" And so it's nice to have that position added, so that Hollywood can research. So when they need a consultant, they have a list to follow, to contact and that's really what's most effective for the show. So that would be my suggestion.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon saying, okay, just make sure the interpreter's caught up, now. CJ.

>> CJ Jones: Yes, so this is CJ. So in support of what Troy was saying, there are different shows that I have seen on television. And I've noticed that it's very, very important to have the consultant and have an explanation and have the consultant meet with the director as well, working with the deaf actor but also working with the director. Because a lot of times there'll be questions like, the director will ask, "Well, what are you explaining?" And it's important for the director to understand the translation of the language is key, cultural mediation and the the description of the language and the tempo of the dialogue going back and forth on camera and on screen. So, it's not just a straight dialogue. No, it's just more than that. So, you really have to have the sign language consultant to be applicable, not only for the language translation, but to work side-by-side with the director, to understand the visual perspective and understand the eye of the deaf communication. That's so important and effective.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. As a new, Troy, go ahead and then I have a question for Anne.

>> Troy Kotsur: This is Troy. I agree with CJ's remarks. Based on my experience on the set, working with the director of "Coda", Sian Heder, she came up to me and wanted to talk with me and the rest of the cast including Marlee Matlin and Daniel Durant. We were the family and she asked, she said, "Could you also improv the lines "that weren't there in the script, can you do that?" And I said, "Okay, but I'm wondering, you know, "how would they know what our lines that we improv?" So we had deaf eyes being Anne and Alexandria that could follow our dialogue and keep track and capture all the signs that we use. So then when you edit it, it became seamless. And so it's important to have that position in place as an ASL consultant, to foster those kinds of things. Anne?

>> Anne Tomasetti: Exactly.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. So, we're going to be discussing, after Anne gives her response, how to find those ASL consultants and where we can find ASL coaches. So we'll hold on to that, regarding TASL culture and consultancy. Now, as far as ASL coaches, there are several issues and titles that can be given. They can be an ASL master or they can be considered an ASL director, a coach or a dialect coach, or even a director of art in ASL. So the job is the same, regardless of the title but I'm wondering, Anne, what is your process? Is it pre and during and post-production? How is it that you're involved and what exactly is it that you do? Go ahead, Anne.

>> Anne Tomasetti: Sure, I can speak about my experience from the movie "Coda" that I just worked on. And so, before pre-production, I wasn't involved, I was involved during production and post-production. So for pre-production, during the writing process and during the discovery process, I really have to, you know, give a hats off to Sian Heder and to Alexandria Wailes. So Alexandria Wailes was there working with Sian, and Sian who is the director of the movie. And so Sian and Alexandria, they would play with the script. And Sian has very specific, beautiful English phrases that she writes, I mean, her script is beautiful. And so she would show that to Alexandria and Alexandria would take a look at it and would sign the ASL parts of the story. And so Sian through Alexandria's signs were able to maybe change some of her dialogue because she would see what her English words looked like in sign language. And she wasn't sure if that's exactly the message she wanted, so then she would edit her script to make sure that the ASL was the message she wanted. And Sian had this vision of what the story would become, and she could see that, through the ASL. And you can't see that in a frozen text, with ASL in it. You had to really go through that process of having the message come to life in ASL from English. And that was the pre-production and Alexandria was part of it. Then she had an opportunity to go on to a production where she could be an actress, so she needed somebody to work on set throughout production of the film. And I am so grateful that Alexandria was partnering with me and Alexandria did all the pre production work, which is before we shot that movie. And we met often, and we met with Emilia Jones who is the actress who plays Ruby Rossi, the CODA in the movie, and Alexandria worked on all of her translations for the script. And she generously gave that over to me. And then during the movie, on production, on set I was able to make sure that Emilia was able to take those translations and really wear those translations. And sometimes I had to tweak them to maybe make it fit her better, so she was more comfortable and confident in signing them. And so I was carrying all of that during production well, that was just before we started shooting. Then once we started shooting, Emilia would, sometimes when we were on-set she would have to review the signs with me beforehand. And then while we were shooting, Daniel, Marlee and Troy, I would watch their signs to make sure that their signs were following the script. And we did have some nights where we would get together, just the deaf talent and the crew, and we would get together with the deaf actors and we'd work on their translations, and we'd play around and we'd have the CODA there and we would work on some things. And it actually, it wasn't a frozen scenario. We were able to be creative with it and to work on it. And they felt comfortable with their performances and the language in front of the camera. So, that's where I got involved, at that point, while we were on-set and I worked with Sian throughout the whole filming of the movie, I was with her, I was looking at the monitor to make sure that their signs were in frame, that they weren't out of the scene. And it was sometimes we would have to adjust things. And I was also supporting Emilia who's the CODA that was signing and to make sure that she was comfortable with her signs. And then I worked with the script supervisor because she wanted to make sure that everybody is following the script and everyone's on their lines. So, there were so many moving parts while I was there, and so many things that I did and the on-set work, we can talk more about the details and the technical things, if it comes up later, there's a lot of tips and ideas that I have. And then we'll just briefly touch on the post-production, it's when everything's done and there is still some work to be done in post-production. So often Sian wanted to check the signs during editing and the captions to make sure that they were accurate. And often she would send me some, a clip to watch and that went on for a few months during editing, and then We finished that project and that brought me here to this panel.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Oh yes, okay. So, I wanted to add some questions that people have already been asking in so far as what a consultant is and what an ASL coach is, and peoples don't seem to understand the difference between them. So, does anybody want to expand on that, CJ?

>> CJ Jones: Yes, yes. This is CJ. Right now, our company SignWorld Studios is working with Janice Cole to develop in-depth explanation of what the roles are. Plus secondly, we're working on getting the correct qualified individuals to do the translation of scripts, whatever you want to call the dialogue, not just taking anyone who is not qualified to do the translation. It becomes more and more vital to be very, very careful in selecting the right individual to match. Also, the deaf actor prefers their individual to do the translation. And so if there's a new face that's brought in, sometimes it can work, but a lot of times it may not work. So there'll be some issues and compounds with that. So, having a hearing person doing all the translation that may not be qualified, I've had to really fight and advocate to get a qualified specialist, having someone who is authentic and is a specialist to be able to work with that deaf actor effectively.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Now, let's say you're ready to just hire somebody. Where would you find a qualified person? I mean, is that a referral to a deaf person or is it new actor who's deaf working into the business? And Troy, you had your hand up, if you want to add something to that?

>> Troy Kotsur: This is Troy. Similar to what I said earlier, you have SAG, you have the unions where they had this new position, that's part of the list of, that's credentialed for the movie, the music, you have the stunt director, you have the dialogue director and what about the sign language master or the director of sign language? That needs to be a part of it. And so this way people can better find us to do that kind of work.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Now, in so far as an ESL coach, Troy when you have a script and you know it's done and you know that there's some special grammar that exists in ASL that does not exist in English and you need to make those grammatical interpretations, so what is it that you do, if you're just going to improv? How is it that you handle that, I'm curious.

>> Troy Kotsur: Okay, this is Troy. Thanks for that question Jevon. So when I get the script, it's all English based, right? And there are certain jokes that work from a hearing audience, but you need to have deaf humor. And so there's the challenge. And sometimes we want to make it even better and have it be even funnier. And so what I was able to do is to play around with the signs, keep the same intent, but to give a multitude of choices and then find out what best fits the character as this crazy fishermen guy who, you know, lives on the sea for years on end. And you know, this fishermen sign language, you know, it's kind of like, yeah, street talk but on the sea. And so the signs that I came up with, as a ASL consultant, when I saw them laugh, then I knew that it was gonna work and it got approved. And it was nice to have a set of deaf eyes and seeing if they liked the improv, you know, it's nice if, and if they weren't in the picture, if we didn't have that extra set of deaf eyes, I can't help imagine how anybody would really catch on. And so in my past experience, I worked with "Sue Thomas: F.B.Eye". I was, had a reoccurring role and there was one scene where there was an actor that forgot their lines and I knew what their lines were, and so I fed them the lines, but at the same time the camera was on me and then time went on and they did the editing and I usually, they check in with us before it goes to final production. And so they give us a rough draft of it. And I saw in that part of that one scene you could see me signing, "You forgot your lines," but it didn't say it in the script. And I said, you know, they said like, "Oh my gosh, "the person fixed their line." And then they had to edit it out, so it wasn't in there. So that's why we need an extra set of deaf eyes. Right, and I mean, that's what really and CJ, you need to have that.

>> CJ Jones: Uh-huh, yeah.

>> Jevon Whetter: Jevon signing, okay, so in regards to improv, Anne, what is your experience? Troy had to do that improv, what would you do? You know, after you deal with that improv, what would you do?

>> Anne Tomasetti: Oh boy.

>> Jevon Whetter: It's pretty tough, right? It's grueling work.

>> Anne Tomasetti: I loved those moments. I loved when Troy went off script, it was really fun but it was great for me to be there as the deaf person, having those deaf eyes and being able to see when Troy was doing his moments and see the reaction from me or the horror and the shame, "Don't do that." But, you know, there, it was nice and the director, who was always next to me would look at me and ask me why I was laughing at that. And she was picking up on what was happening. And she, during his improv was able to see what worked and then I would explain what he did. And then I, you know, there was a really large condom and it's a very stretchy condom that he put on, okay. So those are the things I had to do while we going through this, I had to explain, and Troy was just fantastic and he also affected me because what I did, everything he improved, I had to write it down, when he was making new lines. So I was, always had a little handy notebook and I was making sure I captured all of those notes because the script supervisor needed to know that, the director needed to know that. So, we had to make sure that I kept track of it. It was crazy, and I loved it, but it was a lot. (laughs)

>> CJ Jones: Yes, this is CJ. It's fascinating to see how Troy shared his experience with the improv. And it is fascinating because you worked with and worked alongside other deaf actors, so you felt more comfortable and at ease during that setting.

>> Troy Kotsur: Yes, that was very important.

>> CJ Jones: That's a real simple explanation. So to be able to provide that setting across from working with another deaf individual, feeling comfortable and having that following along, it's a lot of fun, it's a lot of fun in that interchange. So, with the film "Baby Driver", I was able to drop some hints without stepping on the director's toes in his direction. So for example, you know that shape, that shape like, "Wow!" and the director was like, "Wow, that handshake it wasn't in the script. "But I kinda threw that in."

>> Troy Kotsur: I remember, it made me laugh.

>> CJ Jones: Yeah, I threw that in, so that was some kind of natural improvisation that showed that how deaf people can do this and can rise to meet the challenge and allowing the director to allow deaf actors that freedom to do that, just like what Troy was saying.

>> Troy Kotsur: Well, we didn't want to waste their big budget.

>> Jevon Whetter: Yeah, everyone who's doing a lot of research into the deaf community, I mean, that's something they should do, right. But let's say you have a deaf director and all those barriers are now of course defused, but still you're going to have to work with an interpreter. So, now I would like to focus the attention to working with a director, whether you have a deaf director who needs an interpreter, or those who are hearing who also rely on the interpreter, maybe you have a hearing director who's going to need an interpreter. So, let's talk about interpreters on the set. How is it that you use interpreters on the set, and how many would you need? So, I'm going to start with Troy. Troy, did you want to answer? Okay, go ahead.

>> Troy Kotsur: Sure, in 2013, I directed a low budget film called, "SuperDeafy: No Ordinary Hero". And when I directed, we had a crew of about 50 hearing people and we had four interpreters. Three interpreters rotated, depending on the scenes but we had one dedicated interpreter that had to be with me every time, because when people were talking into the headset, I didn't have access to that, so I gave it to the interpreter. So they were on my side and if somebody wanted to reach out, the interpreter relayed that message and then I would relay the message back to them. And then that's how the communication was facilitated. And so it's really common sense, you just have to change it up, it's quite simple.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Okay, Anne and then CJ.

>> Anne Tomasetti: On the movie "Coda", we tried to preplan how many interpreters that we were going to need and where we were going to need them. And we found out that we needed an interpreter in the makeup trailer, we needed an interpreter on the side. We needed in headquarters and in base camp, and so we needed interpreters all over. So we had an idea of nine interpreters (laughs) and that was way too many. When we arrived, we narrowed it down to four interpreters. And most of the interpreters that were there before the shoot, so we had those four there and we assigned them to positions, let's say on-set. They had their places around the set and where they should remain during the production, but then we noticed that as we were shooting and as the days were going on, we had three deaf actors. And then we had the interpreters in their zones and the environment of the story with the deaf family and a director who really wanted to connect with her deaf actors, and that's how she directs. She connects to her actor, she needs to be a part of them, and she wants to be able to communicate with them so intensely, and so we realized that we didn't need interpreters, always with the director, they were able to give them a moment, the director and the actors to communicate with each other. And they would, they would gesture, they would get the point across. And if there was something complicated or that they weren't able to get across through their way of communicating, then when they needed the interpreter they would wave one over and an interpreter would come but they were always on the ready. They were sort of just standing by, watching the director and the actors communicate. And then they would just run over and be able to fill in the gaps. And so we also had an interpreter in video village, which was really important, and that was doing the audio track for the script. And that was speaking all of the lines into a recording, so the editor would be able to know what the deaf actors were saying, what they were signing, and so the script supervisor knew where they were too. So there was a lot. And then we eventually just narrowed it down to two interpreters on-set, who were always there. And as soon as the shot was over, they called, "Cut", that the interpreters came over. So it's fluid, it's not something that's a fixed number, it's not the same for every production. It depends on the connections that you have. And while we were going through the process, we realized we didn't need as many as we thought, we thought we were going to be so dependent on them and then we ended up becoming more independent and having less interpreters in a more effective way.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. I promised CJ an opportunity to his comments. So Troy, if you wouldn't mind, CJ.

>> Troy Kotsur: Okay.

>> CJ Jones: Yes, yes, thank you. I just wanted to share my experience working on different sets and how I found how the interpreter had worked with me. So, for example, during the shooting of "Baby Driver", when I was casted, I knew right away everyone would feel awkward, it would be an awkward moment having a deaf actor on-set. So I had to educate them first and explained to them the role and I also said that I'd need an interpreter on-set. And they said, "Hey, CJ, whatever you need." So I had contacted and had interviewed several interpreters and I selected one interpreter that was with me on-set. I introduced the interpreter, introduced what their role would be on the set when I showed up, and if there were any questions or dialoguing that needed, you would speak directly to me and how the interpreter would work. And Edgar Wright, this is his sign name, Edgar Wright, the director always called me and had the interpreter with me, and he became very sensitive and aware. And after that it became so much more comfortable and relaxed. So, educating them prior and telling them about the role and function, that in the role of the interpreter was you know, speaking directly to me, not to the interpreter. So, it really helped break barriers and was successful.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Okay, Troy.

>> Troy Kotsur: This is Troy. Oh, I also wanted to add something. When I directed that on the set and we had the interpreter there was another piece I wanted to add. There was a secondary role of a person who was an interpreter, and when there was a specific scene I would have two hearing people that I directed but how could I have access to them? Right, they're using their voice, I wanted to know if they were articulating or that they were flat. And if they told me that the one person's voice was flat or they forgot a word, then I would go up to them and I would give them a director's note so that they can make that adjustment. And we were able to work that into the whole system. People might be wondering, you know, how does you have a deaf director and hearing actors? And so we had that specific role and it was very nice to have that talent for those specific needs.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Okay, Anne.

>> Anne Tomasetti: And I also think the choices of interpreters that you ended up going with is really important. And we got so lucky because this film is about CODAs, It's about a CODA and we had three CODA interpreters on set. And we had our sweet Emilia, the actress who was playing the CODA, whenever she had questions about being a CODA she actually had three consultants there, because they were able to advise her in a way that was to help her get into her role. And she was really able to benefit from them.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Okay, so I wanted to add, many times a production company doesn't know anything about working with a deaf person. They may not have any understanding of it. So the first time they get that opportunity they just figure, "Well, I'm just going to contact "an interpreting agency." Is that a good way of going about it? Should they ask an interpreter agency if they have any deaf consultants, should they ask that question? Should they ask an interpreting agency if they have a deaf consultant or should you just, you know, let that be the case because we want to have authentic representation. So, we want to be able to create jobs for deaf individuals and allow for those opportunities to exist. Another thing to consider is starting a good point by just having RespectAbility, for example who have this Hollywood toolkit for various disabilities where you can start being able to contact the people you need to, and being able to have that as a constant vehicle to grow the pool of talents. So, you might want to look into that. Now, and so far as interpreters is, are there any challenges or interesting stories that you've had while dealing with an interpreter on-set and what solutions did you find, Troy?

>> Troy Kotsur: Hi, this is Troy. I was a guest star on "Criminal Minds" and it was number 801 and anyway, I was an escapee and the police were after me. It was a really interesting role, it was funny but there was a scene where I was supposed to be driving this car. And I knew what it said in the script, and so here I was in this car and then I had an interpreter with me and we were waiting and there was the production team and the directors and they were all conferring. And then they were looking at me, and I bumped my interpreter. I said, "Do you mind going over there "and seeing what's going on?" And so they address them say, "Oh, is there a problem here?" And they said, "Well, we just didn't realize "that Troy's going to be driving "but he needs auditory access on the headset "so we can tell them where to park and how to move back "and things like that, how we communicate with him." And I said, "Well, you know, I'm really happy "that you asked me that, this is how we'll do it. "We'll have the interpreter in the backseat. "And when you give them the time, "I'll look in the window and while you're talking to her "or him, the interpreter and then I'll have access to that "through the rear view." And then when we went to shoot the screen, they put their head down so they were invisible. And then that's how they gave me that kind of insight. So, it really worked out beautifully.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Wow, that's very creative and very important. I think that's necessary for deaf performers or people who are deaf working on crew to be able to ask for that without there being any assumptions, to be able to ask, you know, that we can find solutions, remember we're deaf and disabled people are the survivors, this is our lives. This is what we know, and this is how we have survived and have fought to survive this way. So, there are many different ways, you know, just simply ask the talent, either the deaf talent or disabled talent or the crew. Troy, and then CJ, I'd be interesting to find any interpreting situation or a thing that you might have found. And if CJ, if you wanted to add something?

>> CJ Jones: Well, not really, except for James Cameron and "Avatar", he is very, very aware of the interpreter and what their role is. And if the interpreter is not around he will yell, "CJ!" He'll yell, and, you know, the set was huge, like a football field, the size of a football field and he would scream and he would say, "Oh, I'm sorry." He would mouth that, "I'm sorry," 'cause everyone would be looking at him and we'd find the interpreter and the interpreter was, you know, kind of embarrassed at that. But now, you know, scenes, James would come up to me and tap me and say, "Hey, where's your interpreter?" so he would never yell across like a football field and disrupt people anymore.

>> Troy Kotsur: Maybe they could just text you next time, CJ?

>> Jevon Whetter: This is getting, let's hold the comments, so we don't have any overlapping for the interpreters just to catch up here. Okay, so just want to make sure that we have interpreter thing to catch up, so there's no overlapping. Anne, did you have a short story before we move on to the next subject?

>> Anne Tomasetti: Sure yeah, I just have a short story. So, what we didn't realize is that during the night shoots that the, it was pretty dark out and the actors would be moving around the set. And so during the day we had great lighting, but then as soon as the nighttime came and all the lights had to go off and the deaf people were a little startled, the deaf actors because it was so dark and there was no lights around. So, then we all took out our phones and we got our phone lights and I got my light and I made sure that it was able to shine it on the actors. And then we would hold the light over the crew and over the script and over the actors to make sure we were able to communicate. So, we didn't really realize at night that it was going to be so dark. So then, the next night, I've got to give kudos to the crew because they really were concerned about the communication. And they wanted to make sure that the deaf eyes had access at nighttime. So they created some sort of contraption that went around the interpreter and it had this light that would shine on them, so when it was dark they were able to see the light shine on the interpreter. And so they were, it was a huge, bright light and it was illuminating but it was able to enable their communication. And it was, it was kind of like a campfire, it was very cute, it was great. And that was just, the point is that we were adapting. When we saw a problem, we had to be creative and we had to find a solution.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Oh okay, so I know that this topic can go on and on and there are a lot of stories that we can tell and spend many hours trying to do that, and a lot of information that can come from that. So, we want to touch as many topics as possible. So now I'd like to turn the attention to the support of deaf and disabled filmmakers, because, you know, there are very talented deaf and disabled filmmakers and some of them with formal training and some of them have a lot of experience or a variety of talent out there. So, I'm wondering how is it that Hollywood can help and support and develop filmmakers, who are deaf? For example, just having that authentic representation, having an authenticity is very important, to be able to make, you know, a production team, to think about how they're going to talk about or work about or write about a deaf character. But if you don't have any deaf crew, what do you do? You know, so would it be good to have someone who is of authentic representation, to select more of that authentic representation, both in front and behind the camera? So why, would you say that it's important to be able to have that? Anyone on the panel can answer, Troy.

>> Troy Kotsur:This is Troy. Thank you for your question, Jevon. I think the best thing to do, you know you need somebody to really prove their work. If they made a short film and they understand how to interact with deaf writers and deaf directors and to come together. Most of the time I've noticed, in Hollywood, I'll just put it in one word, there's fear. You know, they have to learn just to add, you know, the less, just four more letters and become fearless, right? There are these opportunities, there are shared experiences, they're missing out, right? And you know, they're missing out, we're missing out, right? We want to come together and that's what makes a project great, and it's a process. So the question, is Hollywood ready?

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon, CJ go ahead.

>> CJ Jones: Yes, this is CJ. I'm very, very glad you expanded on that, Troy, making it more colorful and more exciting. Now, our company just received funding to establish a training program on editing and 2D 3D animation for below the line and above the line work. I know there's so much of a need and there's many companies. And I know there are many companies that are out there, that are ready, they have editing, they have camera crews and all of that. So, how would they benefit from working with people from, you know, my company? So, just knowing what's needed. So, for example, when I was working on "Avatar" for the past two years, I saw that everything was so automated and so quick, everything was happening so quickly. And I thought to myself, "How can we establish "that range of communication to resolve, "resolve issues that come up?" So, having someone meet someone who is qualified, who had a lot of experience, of course there are deaf folks that have accessibility and they select their own individuals. But, you know, having their talented work and training someone, which is why I am doing that in my company: below the line, above the line collaborations with the movie industry to produce that talent and have those talented people out there and collaborate would make it a great experience for all.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Troy, go ahead.

>> Troy Kotsur: This is Troy, I'm so excited, what CJ shared and all these opportunities, you know, I have a project that we've been working on and it's called Signing Animation. And it's so exciting to see this effort. We have more than five talented deaf artists and we've got a hearing team that works with them and they all work together to develop new signs, that are depicted in art. And they're going to have a Kickstarter, just next month, and we're really excited to see what happens with this project. You know, seeing deaf people that are very talented to be able to share their talent and it's on online, you can check it out, deafanimation.com for more information. It's really exciting to see this come to fruition. And this is something that we need, you know, we want to, you know, carry on this tradition and to really lift up artists.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Okay, so I think that it's very important for studios to understand and production companies to understand about giving deaf talent opportunity, to be able to shadow someone. For example, if we have a training program or a shadowing program that they have at SAG or PGA. I remember a very long time ago there was a very well-known TV show. I think there were five scenes where they had many deaf characters, who would show up periodically, but not one deaf writer on the team. And the TV show typically would just have guest directors who would direct particular scenes. So that is a lost opportunity for deaf talent, deaf directors, deaf people behind the camera. So, I'm wondering how is it that we slowly introduce maybe back the deaf talent representation for our community, our history, our culture instead of just performing. So, the community needs to have more of that. Troy, I saw you raise your hand.

>> Troy Kotsur: Well, I'll just say it again, fearless right? People are afraid. And look, I know there are budgetary concerns and things like that, and you're hoping you get revenue in the end, and it can be scary as an endeavor but it's nice to bring in authentic talent and make that a priority, so that you can bring it to the next level.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. I wanted to give Anne an opportunity to also make a comment, Anne.

>> Anne Tomasetti: I think lately or in our history, I think there's a lot of stuff happening right now, especially within the recent history of the past few years. There's a lot more deaf accessibility and deaf people on different levels. So, there's more opportunities available out there and in the industry, there's a lot more. And so, there's people who have interests and they want to work with deaf actors. So, there's more opportunity. And I do think that the people who are up there, who have the power, I think that if we can just get into that world a little bit more and to have more, more reach up on the ladder. And I think that's what we can do. For deaf and disabled groups, I think we do need to get their attention, we need to keep climbing, we need to keep trying. And I don't think that it's time for us to be against each other, I think we need to lift each other up. We all need to do this together. And this is a really important time in our history. The story's changing, our stories are becoming more authentic, wherever our representation's becoming more authentic. And I think we have more opportunities to show them now that we can do this. And so, you see that there are deaf people who are already filmmakers, who are writers. We know that, we know that there are several of us out there and we need to get together and maybe start our own production company like CJ has, or we need to have more of a connection with each other and collaborate more and we can see each other more. And then we can get together and produce movies and TV shows, more content that reflects who we are, our culture, our community, our stories, how we want to be represented in our everyday lives. So, within that kind of structure, by all of us collaborating and being together, then we'll be able to do that more. And you know, I do understand that we need their support, the higher-ups, the powers that be. But I think we should do it internally first.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Okay, now CJ, I saw you raising your hand, CJ.

>> CJ Jones: Thank you, thank you. So, I'm starting to feel really excited here because it is so important. It's very important right now to figure out how to succeed in collaboration in the industry and looking at the pool of talent that we have. So I've been on panel discussions quite a bit. I've gone on various panel discussions to talk about it and it's getting old, it's getting tired. Where's the action, where is it? So quite recently, being bold, you know, being authentic, being blunt, I've got to admit, I'm tired. You know, the collaboration has to take place. I've had 12 scripts that I've developed, good quality writing, to really expand and include more deaf people, and I've submitted them into the industry. I've submitted them to Hulu, to Netflix, to Disney Plus, Awesome TV, I've done that. One company, all except one company got back to me and said, "No, the themes for your scripts are very similar. "The stories are all similar." But wait a minute, wait a minute. There are deaf leading roles, they're stories written by deaf individuals, you know, similar themes, what, and I was shut down. I was shut down. So, I've been in touch with CAA, California Agency, to have this dialogue with the industry and to find out what are they looking for? This is our story, you've never seen our story before. Why are you shoving this into the closet? We're seeing famous black actors, we're seeing stories being told but when it comes to, you know, deaf stories, I get you, Troy, you can't be afraid, it's being fearless. I get it, I get your message. These stories are very important to be told, you know, opening your mind, opening your heart to diversity, to be more inclusive, come on, take that action. Thank you.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Just quite quick, oh Troy, go ahead.

>> Troy Kotsur: This is Troy, something real short. You know, working alone, getting into Hollywood, if you're just a fragile pencil, you're pushed aside. If we collaborate and we have a whole case of pencils that's where you can affect change.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. I hope the interpreters were able to get that, yes, that was important.

>> CJ Jones: Jevon?

>> Jevon Whetter: With respect, I'd like to be able to move on for the sake of time. Now I'd like to talk about, just generally, access, for example, many, many, many, many film festivals exist out there, but what is your frustration about access to those festivals? Now it's Sundance and the amazing thing has happened is that there are captions now on movies, which was like, "Wow!" you know, and so I'm curious, from your perspective, that lack of captioning, as an example. I've gone to the AFI to study production, to study film, that's where I got my formal training. And so, you know, you want to go to film festivals to continue to study your craft but without captions, then we have to wait until the very last opportunity to be able to have that. And I think that's very frustration, that causes a lot of frustration, but does anybody else want to mention any other frustrations you might've across, CJ?

>> CJ Jones: Yes, yes, I was involved in "Door in The Woods". It was a small budget, low budget film, and there was a guy who wrote a role in, multitasking. It was a tough role for him to talk and and act and interpret and all that. So at the film festival, there was a large crowd and there were different films being shown, and of course there was no captioning involved but prior to that, I was told, "CJ I'm going to be, "you know, I'll provide captioning for you." And I was like, "Wow, the director is going to do that. How sensitive, great." I was hopeful that there'd be captioning. But no, you know, what ended up happening was, after there was a panel discussion, you know, there was a question asked, "Why wasn't captioning added "to the entire film festival?" you know, for other deaf people in the audience or people that are latent deaf or lost their hearing later in life, and other folks were like, "Yes, we really should have captioning "in all films at a festival." So it was like, oh my god, why didn't this happen? I need to do this for all of my films. So a lot of the directors at the film festival really learnt from that experience. So one low-budget film really made a resounding effort to spread the word of accessibility and access and having that accessibility for all, because if you don't, you know, trillions of dollars are going to be wasted.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Okay, I wanted to add something and then Troy, I'll let you make your comments. At film festivals, they may provide interpreters for Q and A's but all the film festivals allow for networking, being able to dialogue with people. But that networking opportunity for these individuals doesn't exist, unless we have interpreters with us all the time and interpreters just have their opportunity to work. Those are their hours, and then they're gone. So we only have them with Q and A opportunities, but we need to be able to communicate and network. So how do we overcome that barrier? You know, yes, interpreters do cost and we do need to pay interpreters, but is it fair for us as the deaf talent to have to pay the interpreters to come with us to all these festivals? That becomes a financial burden on us, Troy.

>> Troy Kotsur: This is Troy, that's a great point, Jevon. To that question, based on my experience, I would say, you know, 95% of the time producers, they have a budget that they put together and they always forget about post-production, to make sure that there's enough money left over to provide access like captioning. And so when the money is diminished and then it's an afterthought and you don't have the money, then you have to look to get it. And so you need to be proactive and make sure that you have the resources in place, so you can make things accessible for the blind, for the deaf, and this way you can reach out to a brighter, a broader audience, I think that's really it.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. So, suppose that you have a deaf individual who wants to raise the bar. So what is your advice, just quickly, what advice would you give to give the opportunity for deaf talent to raise that bar? Anyone can answer. If we can take one at a time, CJ.

>> CJ Jones: Yes, it is so important to understand that you just can't sit and gripe and complain. You know, why didn't I get this role? Why wasn't I casted, why wasn't I selected? Why, why, why? You have to work your arse off. And by doing that, is by going to different events, you have to go to events and even pay thousands of dollars to learn and meet, that's where your networking takes place, and that's how you get through and guess what? I've gotten more networking and it's helped me meet some really good people through that and having an interpreter with me and having that dialogue, people contacted me after that. It is so powerful to just show up in a sea of hearing people being the only deaf person. I'm the only deaf person, just to remember and tell people, "I remember you and you remember me," that's how you sell yourself. That's how people sell themselves, being everywhere instead of nowhere. So, that's not authentic if you just complain but working very hard is the key to success. That's the passion, you've got to have that passion. It's the language we all have here on this panel. Last thing I wanted to kind of impart to people is for deaf people who want to raise the bar, deaf people have to work together, put your egos aside, swallow your egos aside. Troy has some support, we can support Troy. We can support Anne, we can all work together as a collaborative force. The black community is doing that, they're successful in their work. The disabled and deaf community need to continue to be persistent and show and grow and make support and support each other in this journey. That's when the bar gets raised but remember, keep barking, keep barking.

>> Troy Kotsur: I can't hear you, what?

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon, did you want to add anything?

>> Troy Kotsur: This is Troy. CJ, you put it really well. I've been involved in Deaf West and other theater companies, where you're working with different individuals over years, and sometimes I'll work with directors on repeated projects and, you know, having talent get together again, writers, directors, it all comes back to attitude, dependability, commitment, giving your best, and then people will remember you and they'll want to work with you again and again.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon, Anne yes, please.

>> Anne Tomasetti: I just want to add on to what both CJ and Troy said. I think all of us need to get together, work together, be creative together, play together, in order to raise the bar. I mean, the bar is already here. And so with support from the deaf community, with deaf artists, if we all got together and support each other in the business, we'd pull each other up and we'd just all rise up together with our stories, with our rich experiences that we have. And we'd bring that to the bar where it is, we rise up together to where it is, we can do it. We can get there. And yeah, I've seen movies. I've seen their stories and they inform us as an audience, what is out there and there's a lot of the same type of stories, but we can just change the perspective and show our stories. We can show people of disabilities, people of color. We can show everybody real life, what we look like. And if we just keep making those products and putting them out there and people will see our perspective, and then they'll realize, "Oh yeah, we're just people on earth, "just like everyone else. "We're all here together, sharing our stories." And that is where we need to keep going, and that bar is going to keep going up with us.

>> Troy Kotsur: This is Troy. Okay, I just want to make a few comments before we go to our question and answer opportunities.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. So there are many opportunities that exist with training. For example, we have academic programs like CFI and SDSU and UCLA, USE. There are many ways that exist but not just the one way. RespectAbility Labs, for example, Sundance Labs, for example and there are also independent film labs. So there are trainings that can be taken and it just doesn't have to be that's the case. You know, we also have unions like SAG and WGA and a variety of those who have their own labs. Now, I'm just looking down at the list that I have here. Oh, mentorships, you're gonna apply for mentorship opportunities, internship opportunities. No pay, but go for it, you know, you have to build your network, you have to find what you can find and wherever you can find it.

>> Troy Kotsur: Absolutely.

>> Jevon Whetter: So, there are many ways to be able to get to where you want to get to. That would be really the goal. So the panelists, what are your needs? What are your expertise? What are your skills that guided you to where you need to be and as a panelist you have mentioned. Now, because of the interest in time and we're kind of running low on it, I wanted to ask Del if he can just feed me some of the questions that we've been receiving from the audience. Del, do you have any questions that you want us to field? One question is, and anyone can answer. Do you feel discriminated? Have you ever had that experience where, you know, whether you're working on a film project where that discrimination came up or racism or ableism or gender discrimination, have you ever had that experience? And can you give us examples of how maybe you were able to overcome those or find solutions? Anybody, Troy.

>> Troy Kotsur: This is Troy. I auditioned for "Criminal Minds" and before that, saw a message on my phone from a friend of mine who is hearing, and is also an actor and he texted me and "I feel like, you know, "I don't feel right to audition for this role. "It's for a deaf person, I thought of you" and said, "Can you kind of take my time slot for audition? "I don't want the producer to get mad." And so I showed up and there was this whole queue of about 20 hearing actors, and I was the only deaf actor. And so I auditioned and I nailed it and they picked me and they said, "Look, they'd never really thought "about having a deaf actor in that role." They didn't think that they'd be able to find somebody and they feel like sometimes, "Oh, just bring in a hearing person. "It's easier to communicate with them. "You know, a lot of hearing people, they just don't know "what it's like working with deaf people." But I was very grateful to this colleague who gave up their audition slot. And so when they asked me for an interpreter, the person that gave up the role, I brought them on in that capacity and we both got paid. So, that was a good example of somebody that was very generous and supportive to disabled talent. And I want to see more people out there doing the same.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon, One story that touched me and it didn't happen to me, but a deaf actor friend of mine who was a talented actor, auditioned for a game show. Now, this was many years ago and there was an interpreter available, and so they actually got in, got a call back, the contestants pool grows smaller but they still maintained their position in the pool, and they were about to get into the show's finale, but unfortunately that didn't happen. But then watching the game show on TV, I was awestruck that the interpreter was involved as one of the contestants. And I went, "What?" I mean, that's very concerning, you know, there's a code of ethics that needs to be followed by interpreters, I know that they have a code of ethics. So that's discrimination there, because they can just look at the interpreter, "Okay, we'll just find this person." So, do you have any other experience in discrimination that you've experienced either pre-post or during production, anyone?

>> Anne Tomasetti: This is Anne. So, it seems that most of the time the discrimination against us deaf actors is just that people are not deaf auditioning for deaf roles, right, so that's what we see the most. And I think that's what the discrimination is most prominent for me. And it's maybe not discrimination, but it's blocking the discrimination from happening. But what happens is, the filmmakers will have a specific character, maybe a person of color or that person has to be a specific type of person, they're deep in the community, they have to be, I don't know, let's say they're like some sort of rapper and well, this actually happened to me. They asked me, a white girl, to support and to teach this hearing young boy who did not know any American Sign Language to rap battle somebody in sign language, so I realized quickly I wasn't the right person for that. And in this day and age, I'm absolutely shocked that that happened, that they even approached me for this opportunity because it wasn't right, and I wasn't the best fit for it. So, I don't know if we can say that is discrimination but a reverse discrimination, whatever the case is, but regardless we need to get rid of that, and we need to just find people who are better matches. And I was able to explain to them the reason why, but they just see that I'm a person who's able to do the work. So they were just like, "Oh, okay yeah, let's ask her." And I said that I have so many people, so many resources that were more appropriate, so, instead of just telling them, "No," I didn't just turn them down, I gave them the resources that they needed. So I was able to fight for other people who were maybe overlooked and give them the opportunity.

>> CJ Jones: Yes well, this is CJ. So in my years of work, I think that what I've experienced in discrimination was also racism because I'm deaf and black and I've met many barriers and came across that. And I've started to realize that, you know, times are changing, people are speaking up, there is more advocacy from the disabled community, raising awareness, and I do appreciate that, but there's still a lot of work to be done within the deaf-black community. There's a lot of black-deaf actors that should be in film. Why aren't there more? Bi people of color, transgender individuals, I advocate for that push, and that's what my company is doing. And it's based on my experience and my frustrations, and I don't want that to happen again to the trans or people of color, indigenous people of color, enough is enough, and that's what my company stands for. You know, the discrimination that I just experienced, I submitted so many stories to Netflix and they turned around and said, "No, these stories have a similar theme. "We won't be considering them." And I was like, "Whoa, wait a minute, "I'm a famous actor, I'm talented," but what was the fear? Again, you know, Troy's famous line of fear and being fearless, that happening really was discriminatory to me. There was no dialogue, there was no interactive process or anything. So, this was very, very discriminatory to me, so for folks, disabled people, black-deaf, really minds need to be opened. And I also want to open sensitivity and open more doors so that there'll be plenty of work for myself as well. And we can work together in the mainstream and be successful together in the mainstream. So very, very important to have the LBGTQI team involved.

>> Troy Kotsur: Hiring talented interpreters, who don't like acting, I think is the solution. They can be more focused and give me greater freedom to delve into my character, and it can be freeing. If we're in competition and sometimes the focus goes on them and it's like, "Hello, I'm over here."

>> Jevon Whetter (Anne’s interpreter): I think an interpreter needs boundaries, they have a certain code of ethics. This is Jevon.

>> Jevon Whetter (Jevon’s interpreter): This is Jevon. The interpreters have a code of ethics they need to follow, and there has to be this boundary. I don't think that we as deaf talent need to lose our jobs or be worried about being overshadowed by an interpreter. There is that role they need to have, it is boundaried, and that's a very clear role. There has to be an opportunity to search for interpreters who know that role and who are not trying to fulfill some secret agenda of theirs. Okay, so Troy, yes. You want to make a comment.

>> Troy Kotsur: This is a Troy, I'll keep it brief, but you need to have, you know, I'll give them a list of the interpreters I like to the agency and then educate the agency on how to fulfill my needs, and that's really important. So, they have a knowledge and a sensitivity and then I can make that connection, and then it just makes my work easier.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. I think that we have another question that's come in, my apologies for cutting that question short. But somebody had asked, as a wheelchair user, that they'd become a consultant for people in wheelchairs but what does your advice on how to start, you know, start that work as a consultant, someone who was in a wheelchair is bringing that position up but what are your answers?

>> Troy Kotsur: This is Troy, as I just said, we need a position. Like we have a sign language consultant. Now, maybe we need a wheelchair consultant, you know, and then have all different disabilities represented that aren't represented in Hollywood right now to really add those people to the fray, I really agree.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Just as an opportunity for RespectAbility, for example, that is an amazing organization to work with. They work with a variety of disabled individuals, not just deaf individuals and they give references, you know, as consultants. So yes, from my perspective, I do try to give those references and please do contact RespectAbility. There are other organizations as well, RespectAbility is not the only, but there needs to be that networking and never stop networking because you never know where that opportunity is gonna come from. So, allow for that interest to exist so that people can keep you in mind, maybe the next day or the next week, or sometime later in the future, you never know that reference will come your way. And that's a healthy relationship that we need to establish with Hollywood. We are very patient, yes. Okay, now the time is coming to an end, just very quickly, if each one of our panelists could just say what projects you're working on now, or future projects that are coming up. I know that we've talked about what you have done, but what's coming up in your future, in the pipeline. We'll start with Anne, then Troy and then CJ.

>> Anne Tomasetti: Sure. I'll start, what's happening right now is, I'm in the process of, while we're talking about growing new writers and directors and actors, well, I'm so fortunate to be a part of a festival, play-writing festival and I'll be working on a 10 minute short play. And I actually self-advocated and I want to practice my editing skills. I do like to play around with that on the side. So I reached out to them and I was able to get an opportunity. And I'm the director and editor for a 10 minute story written by the fabulous Alexandria Wailes. So, I'm in the process of working on that, which is so exciting and that festival is from the Austin Deaf Theater. And there's also a Deaf Spotlight Festival, that's happening in Seattle the first week of April and mine, that I'm working on, or ours I should say, is the first week of May. And so that's what's coming up right now.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon, now CJ. And CJ, What exciting things are happening for you now?

>> CJ Jones: Well, this is all ongoing, right, right, let's see now, okay. Everything is coming up okay. We're working with Hulu, working on a project in London, England. We finally got the project last month, so we're good, thank you, which also means more money coming in, which is great. Secondly, is "Avatar" which will be released next year, December 18th, 2022. Yes, thanks a lot, COVID for the delay. Third, "Baby Driver" the film, Edgar Wright wrote a script for a sequel and there'll be the same cast, including myself yours truly here.

>> Troy Kotsur: Yay!

>> Anne Tomasetti: Congratulations!

>> Jevon Whetter: That's fantastic.

>> CJ Jones: So, the other thing is with my company, like I had said before, I'd been submitting projects and scripts and selling, really marketing my story. There's a character by the name of Chrissy Lemons, she wrote three outstanding scripts. I'm really trying to push for young, deaf talented, that's one, I have a few other writers who are deaf. Fourth, I have established what's called Virtual Creative Workshops for middle and high school students. I've been doing this for about a year now, it's been successful and I've been doing this because I'm encouraging young deaf talent to become creative and pursue their dreams to become writers, actors, really build on their self-esteem to develop what a pitch-deck looks like. And really educate them at this age now, so that when they graduate and move on the talent will be there to draw from, and that is my dream. And I'd love to, fifth, I'd love to be able to talk with all of you more. Maybe if you have some ideas, we can all work together, keep 'em coming, contact me, I love you all.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Okay, now Troy, what are your projects?

>> Troy Kotsur: This is Troy. Well this new movie "Coda", I really want to thank Apple, Apple TV for purchasing the film. I feel very honored, we'll see what happens with the release and that journey. But as I just shared, there's this signing animation project that the Kickstarter's coming up, I'm very excited to see that develop. And also I'm looking to a new challenging movie, "Flash Before The Bang", working with deaf and hearing artists. It's a deaf director, Jevon and Adele and really looking forward to that as a new challenge to work on. It's very exciting, and more time to play golf, hopefully, and also spend time with my family and my dog, playing fetch.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. So, so far as me, I'm still teaching theater at CSUN. I'm working on "Flash Before The Bang." It's a project that I'm developing through PGA on diversity, Film Independent Lab is something else I'm working on. We've gotten a grant from the San Francisco Lab, San Francisco Film Lab. We've got a lot of things that we're working on, and currently, my brother and I are working on a Love Life Deaf Club of documentary film, that occurred in San Francisco in the late seventies. And at that time there were many punk bands that were playing in San Francisco, and there were two groups that actually came together and oddly enough, created a collaboration of deaf individuals and the punk scene. And we also have a story that I'm not going to be able to tell you much detail about, but there is something else that's occurring. And fourth, I'm going to be continuing to work as an ESOP consultant for Dreamworks on a show called "Madagascar: A Little Wild". It's an animation that you'll be able to find on Hulu which I've been able to work on, and we're on the second season and it seems like it's still going. - All right. - Ellens is involved, we're keeping very busy. And just as CJ has said, just keep this going, Just keep networking, attending everywhere you need to be because you never know what opportunities may show up. So I'm very grateful to Sundance for the opportunity to allow for this panel to happen. And if you have any thoughts on how to have disabled individuals in your projects, start with RespectAbility. The toolkit, the Hollywood toolkit that they offer, which is available free to you all and ask, Troy just said, don't be fearless, just ask. We're not going to bite, I promise. Thank you all, thank you.