>> Lauren Appelbaum: "New Amsterdam" is a show I've enjoyed since the beginning, and I think for people with disabilities, it's a show that may have stayed under the radar for way too long in terms of disability representation. From your major story arcs from drug addiction and cancer to including people with disabilities as typical characters, as well as authentic casting and storylines: you've overwhelmingly been an example of best practices of authentic disability representation on-screen and including featuring actors such as Marilee Talkington, Lauren Ridloff, and then storylines focusing on things like ADHD, cancer, drug addiction, in terms of looking at the non-visible disabilities. So David Schulner: why is it important for you to focus on authentic disability representation? So many showrunners may talk about it while you've actually done it.

>> David Schulner: You sent us the questions ahead of time so I should have had a really good prepared answer but, disability... you know what? Representation matters, and I think that simple phrase sums up a lot of what we do. The stories we tell are stories that I haven't seen other places, and from a strictly storytelling point of view, those are the kind of stories that we gravitate toward - stories that are under the radar, that we haven't seen on TV, and honestly, we may have seen these stories, and then they haven't been portrayed by actors with the same disabilities or neurotypical as the characters that were written. So again, representation matters, and if you don't see yourself represented on TV, if you don't see yourself represented in politics, if you don't see yourself represented in the medical profession, if you don't see yourself represented in society, then you are - the people whose job it is to open those doors are limiting access in politics, as an actor, in health care, in every facet of life, and I think if you just boil everything down to 'representation matters,' if people see themselves as important enough to have stories told about them, then you're shining a light on people who have been in the shadows for far too long.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Perfectly said. I didn't send you any talking points, but it's like I did. [ Laughter ] So, David Cap: Rachel Handler who's an amputee and Matthew Jeffers who's a little person, they do exactly what David had said in terms of that they're cast roles that have nothing to do with their disabilities and they're cast in roles as medical professionals, showing not just people with disabilities as patients but as people who are helping others - so this has been an ask of the disability community for decades: what prompted you to cast people with disabilities for roles that had nothing to do with their disability?

>> David Cap: I'll be very honest, nothing prompted me - I think that they're really great actors, to begin with: I saw Matthew in a off-Broadway production at the Flea Theatre in New York probably eight years ago after he graduated undergrad, and I just thought he was a terrific actor, and he remained it on my radar and I brought him in for certain things and, the thing that's been most satisfying to me about "New Amsterdam" honestly in both seasons is, I worked in theater for most of my career, and from the get-go, David and Peter Horton and certainly the networking studio of Grace Wu and Beth Klein, fully embraced the idea that no roles were defined before we saw actors for them, that actors would define the roles, and I knew Matthew was capable of a lot and Rachel is someone who I've met over the years and... it sounds very corny to say, you don't see their disabilities first, you see them as people first, but, in a sense, that's really what it is - every actor has an individuality, has a place that they come from, and it just so happened that these two actors, when we called them in [ snaps ] clicked in the roles that we call them in for - and certainly, I think there is a commitment to this community, that we've had since the beginning as well, so it would be disingenuous to say that it's not an active effort on our part to forward this sort of authentic casting in this show as often as we can. That was a rambling answer but, hopefully...

>> David Schulner: [ overlapping ]

>> Lauren Appelbaum: So Rachel...

>> David Cap: [ overlapping ] And I will say. Well, sorry, can I say one thing? Matthew Jeffers actually said when he was cast, and I've said this story publicly before, Matthew sent me a thank-you note saying, "I have never had a doctor who was a little person, I have never had anybody in my actual life in that kind of position, so to play one on television, and play someone who I wish I had actually had in my own life, is huge" for him, and I think that transcends what we're doing and speaks to the heart of it all I think.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: As a mom with a disability, I'd love to see more parents with disabilities just in general. That's something we don't really see.

>> David Cap: Sure. Absolutely.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: I wanted to mention, like many folks with disabilities, Rachel Handler is a multi-hyphenate: in addition to acting she also is a writer, so she is a participant in our lab and she would love to ask you each a question.

>> David Cap: Sure.

>> Rachel Handler: Thanks, Lauren. Hi David and David.

>> David Cap: Hi, Rachel.

>> Rachel Handler: It's so good to see you again and nice to meet you David - I was in your episode that you wrote of season 2 episode 1 as a nurse and it was - I mean, being on that show is such a great experience. When I lost my leg, I was more of a musical theater performer, and then after my car accident, I started doing more TV and film work, and - I'd never seen what a prosthetic leg looked like before when I lost my leg, so seeing more representation like this is so so wonderful and it inspired me to become a writer, producer and director as well so I could get more of my own work out there, and I'm just curious: how did those disability-specific storylines come about in the writers room? Are they planned when you break the story for the whole season, and do you end up hiring disability consultants for those specific episodes? Just 'cause "New Amsterdam" - you get it right, and I'm just curious how that happens? we there's a couple answers

>> David Schulner: We - there's a couple of answers to that: one is, because of Cap, and because I also started as a playwright in the theater, I've idolized many of the actors that we've hired since I was a kid, and some of those actors - David, correct me if I'm saying his name wrong, but John Christopher Jones...

>> David Cap: Mhmm, yup.

>> David Schulner: He had a stroke recently, is that right?

>> David Cap: I actually think he has Parkinson's Disease, David - he's been suffering from it, yeah, I think for like 10 years.

>> David Schulner: So this is someone I grew up seeing as a comedic genius on stage. I did not know he had Parkinson's, I just know I hadn't seen him in a long time. David brought him in to audition - he wasn't right for that role, but we put his picture on the wall in our writers office and we wrote Parkinson's, and we have now a wall of about eight actors Tim Edmonson - am I saying Timothy Edmondson, who was in "Galavant," who also recently suffered a stroke, so we have a wall of actors with disabilities, and now we're gonna write roles for them. David's brought in so many amazing actors who we haven't used yet, and when we don't use them, we put them up on the wall and we're actually gonna write roles for them because they're amazing actors, and we want to write roles specific toward their disability and put them in front of the camera again, because these are amazing actors who just aren't being used enough. So that's one thing we're doing. Another - and then how we come up with the stories is writer-based: all the stories on "New Amsterdam" are writer-driven, meaning I have a thousand ideas that I want to do, that no one else wants to do them. The writers come in with their own passions and their own articles that they've read and those are the stories we do. And again, our barometer is "have we seen these stories before and do we have a chance to do something new?"

>> David Cap: You know, there's also an actress that we saw for - her name's escaping me right now but there was an actress that we saw for Gigi's role, for Shantae, that you were particularly taken by who I know -

>> David Schulner: She has MS. Correct?

>> David Cap: Yes, she has MS.

>> David Schulner: Yes, she's on our wall.

>> David Cap: And again, that's one of the amazing things about working on this show and it is that there are so many talented actors in this community that do make an impression and then are folded into and inspire the writers in such a holistic - and that word sounds corny - but a holistic way, just like "you know what? That is someone who is talented and has a very specific story to tell or be part of, or can tell a story that actually doesn't speak to their personal story but might elicit it and illuminate another character," and David and the studio and the network are so responsive to that, it's amazing as a casting director to feel like we are working towards effecting positive and actual change which is fantastic. And John Chris Jones - and then I'll shut up, I promise you - John Chris Jones, he's an amazing amazing amazing man, he's a journeyman actor who gave his life to the theater, did a lot of TV, and when he came in, he's advanced enough in the disease where he comes in and he walks with the with a pronounced hunch, he's hunched over and he played a role that didn't call for someone with Parkinson's and at the end of the audition he said, "I just want to thank you so much for bringing me in for this. I don't work as often as I used to and I still feel vital and like I have something to contribute and..." ...shouldn't be that John Christopher Jones is saying thank you for access to opportunity, right? That should just be - he should just still be being called in for anything, and so that that sort of situation happens and it just spurs me on even more to say "you know what? Agents aren't submitting these actors, these actors are in many cases not represented at all, and we need to find them, we need to meet them and find them proactively, we can't be sitting and waiting for them to be put in front of us at all." [Crosstalk]

>> David Schulner: [ overlapping] David Cap, everyone. David Cap. [ Laughter ]

>> David Schulner: The best.

>> Rachel Hanlder: Yes, thank you. Yeah, we're out there - just because I lost my leg doesn't mean I'm a different person - it's only enhanced my acting abilities and my well of emotions and everything. So thank you for saying that yeah.

>> David Cap: And Rachel, is the urban legend true that you have a gold prosthetic leg, right?

>> Rachel Hanlder: Oh, yes - it's true. I can take it off and show you. [ Laughter ]

>> David Cap: I thought I remembered that.

>> Rachel Handler: It's gold and sparkly.

>> David Schulner: Wow. Awesome! [ Laughter ]

>> Rachel Handler: Well, thank you so much you guys.

>> David Schulner: Thanks Rachel, nice to meet you.

>> David Cap: Thanks, Rachel.

>> Rachel Handler: You too.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: And what you're saying, people are really really resonating with in the comments. So people are really enjoying that, and as well as, people are bringing up one of my favorite episodes from season 2 featuring Gigi Cunningham, and this episode featured a young Black actress with Down syndrome, but it touched on so many hot-button topics, from abortion to conservatorship and so many more - we actually had the honor of consulting on the script, myself and my colleague Tatiana, and so I want to bring Tatiana on who also consulted on the episode to ask a few questions.

>> Tatiana Lee: Hi. First of all, I loved that episode - I loved consulting on it, it was amazing. I'm also an actor and also have a disability and those nuanced stories of the intersection of being Black and disabled are not always uncovered so, with all of the things that you guys covered from from Black families to disability to abortion to conservative Christianity and inadequate health care in rural areas and so much more, why was it important for you to talk about stories that have intersect all those things?

>> David Schulner: I am a straight, white, neurotypical male - I have seen so many stories about my life. When I hired the writers for "New Amsterdam," I knew I had straight white male neurotypical covered, and I felt like, "who needs their stories told? Who wants to tell their story?" And so we hired a very diverse writing room full of phenomenal writers who are religious, who are gay, who are Black, who are South Asian, who are - we just have a phenomenal group of writers and their diversity makes them better And our writers are telling those stories. And I'm a very good editor and I have learned I am very good at hiring the right people who then hire the right people who then hire the right people, and I think that's where my strength lies in "New Amsterdam." So I've hired great writers who have important stories to tell, that I take very little credit for. [ Laughter ]

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you so much - it was definitely amazing story to tell, I'm like, "oh my gosh, this is so much in one." I was like, "oh my god, you would never see a network television tell us story like this." I was like, "Yes!"

>> David Schulner: And I have to say, NBC doesn't blink an eye at these stories - they are so encouraged by them and so welcoming of them and we've kind of raised the bar a little bit where they want more of that, so we have so much support.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice. So, with that, Gigi did a great job playing that role, and a lot of times that they say about us as actors with disabilities is that, we aren't equipped to handle stuff like this, so, how hard was it for you to find Gigi and how did you find her?

>> David Cap: Well, the fantastic thing about "New Amsterdam" again is that we have the luxury of David as the showrunner, who gives casting ample advanced notice, so that we actually have the time to invest in a process, if it's going to be a role that might be more challenging to cast, which I know a lot of shows don't get and so we're very appreciative of that. The casting process for Gigi was, it was amazingly fulfilling and challenging and David, I feel like we - you and I and Peter - really were working in concert through that month, month-and-a- half, in terms of us reaching out - I mean, it's basic grassroots, right? Again, there's not a lot of agencies that are representing actors with invisible disabilities, with developmental disabilities - as I'm sure many of you in this 'Brady Bunch'-some box know, right? That's your lived reality. So a lot of it is just us reaching out as an office to theater groups across the country that work with members of a specific population, and in this case the Down Syndrome population, and Gail Williamson, who is at an agency called KMR, who is a vanguard leader in this community - I can't give enough kudos to Gail and what she's done for this and so through -

>> Tatiana Lee: She's my agent. [ Laughter ]

>> David Cap: Is she? I mean, she's peerless, right? She's the best. And she's taught me so much, and I've not been afraid honestly to say, "you know what? I have to learn, and I'm doing my own work to educate myself, but if there's anything that you might offer me without me asking that you think I should know, please let me know," and she did come back and say, "you know what? Some of these speeches, they're hugely challenging," and so to use these as audition pieces for actors from this community, you may not see what they're capable of based on the material that you're giving because of their process, and so I went back to David and Peter and said, "I think this is something that we need to be aware of in terms of what we're asking the actors to do," right? Because you get better at auditioning - you just do, and if you don't do a lot of it, if you are from a historically marginalized or underrepresented community, you don't have the opportunity to come in and get better and better and better. So we saw a lot of actors - not a lot, we saw quite a few, and I sent them to David and Peter and we recognized that it was a challenge, we discussed some other possibilities - "what if we can't find someone who we think we all feel comfortable with and who feels comfortable with the material and whose parents, quite honestly, are going to be okay with them doing this very provocative story line..." because Tatiana, as you mentioned, it was a young woman who wanted to exercise her right to have an abortion, right? In a Christian community. So there were quite a number of parents that said, "this is an amazing opportunity for our daughter" or the guardian said "for our for our charge, but we don't want this particular storyline." And one day, I said to our intern Kate Reid, our awesome associate and myself were just saying, "can you just do one more pass through? Local groups, that sort of thing?" And my intern pulled up this 12-minute documentary of Gigi and we're all huddled around the computer looking at it and it's this moment where time sort of stands still and you're like, "oh my god, I think we're looking at Shante. I think we're looking at Shante." But then you also have this guarded optimism where you're like, "I hope everyone responds to her the way that I think they're going to," but you never know. So then we sent it to David and to Peter and the team ,and they were just like, "this young woman, come on," her vitality and everything about her just burst out of the screen, and we were so fortunate to have her do it ,and Peter Horton just felt like she more than met every challenge - the crew, the directors all came together to figure out how to collectively meet Gigi where she needed to be met and raised her up, and she raised herself up and elevated the storyline in a way that I just find so exciting and it's thrilling, it's totally thrilling, and what I will tell you is that, again, not to proselytize, but it should not be that a random YouTube search is what brought Gigi up and into our into our minds, right? Where's the person, where's the agency, where are the representatives that should be doing that work, right? Anyway.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you so much.

>> David Cap: It was thrilling. It was thrilling, Tatiana. Thank you for the -

>> David Schulner: And I have a -

>> David Cap: ...nice comments

>> David Schulner: I also want to add on to this because, it's not just enough to go through the search that David went through to find this role, but here we have an actress who's never acted on camera before, so are you just gonna throw them into a situation that is not gonna set them up for success? The TV and film production machine, it's not set up to help these actors. So I called the president of NBC and I said, "I know this is important to you, I know finding these authentic actors are important not only the network but our show, I think we need more time to give this actress on set to do this role." And she said, "okay, well, what do you need?" and I thought we needed like a half a day so of course I was like, "I think we need a whole extra day to to give this actress time to flourish," thinking I would be talked down to half a day, and she was like, "great, we'll give you a whole extra.." like, that doesn't happen, to give a production an extra day to accommodate an actor, is unheard of. That's a lot of money, that throws a lot of wrenches and gears - this is a machine that operates very strictly on an eight-day schedule, and NBC said, "sure, we'll give you another day. We believe in this story, we believe in this kind of process," and they gave it to us. That just - never happens.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Something that you may be aware of is that the disability market is actually worth one trillion dollars and is the third largest market in the U.S. So, maybe some of the reasoning was, "oh, well, we're going to get new audience, we're going to get people who are going to really care about this episode" and hopefully bring in new viewers which brings in more ad dollars. So, we always like to share the one trillion dollar market, because that is an argument that folks like you who care about insuring disability inclusion, if you ever come up against someone who pushes back, can be a talking point to kind of use to be able to push for why you might need more time. But that was such a rewarding experience for Tatiana and I, too, had been brought in to help with and then to watch it on TV and then to meet Gigi was really a wonderful experience.

>> David Cap: Cool.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: So I'd like to now kind of switch to a little bit behind the camera, because as you mentioned before that, in order to have that authentic representation onscreen, it's important to have the right people behind the camera as well. One of our lab participants, Ava, has a question on that topic.

>>Ava Rigelhaupt: Hello. I'm so excited to be able to talk to all of you and so my question is for Mr. David Schulner and it is what are you doing as a show to directly encourage more inclusivity of people with disabilities behind the camera? As an autistic writer and also actress, but I am specifically curious if you employ any neurodiverse people in front or behind the camera in any of your shows, and if yes, were they hired knowing that they had a non-visible disability or figured out later etc.

>> David Schulner: It's a great question. So, we shoot in New York, the writers are all in Los Angeles - as I said before, I firmly believe one of my strengths is hiring the right people who then hire the right people who then hire the right people. So I do not hire a lot of the crews thats on our stages. We - Peter and I - hired David De Klerk as our line producer, and then we've hired the production heads, our camera department, director photography, our production designer, our costume designer - we hire those people and then they hire their crews. So, if we hired wrong, it would have a trickle-down effect, and the entire crew would have no diversity. However, in all facets - and I don't know how or why - but when you walk onto our set, our crew is extremely diverse: I've never seen more women on a crew, I've never seen more Black and brown people on a crew - I can't speak to neurotypical or not, I can speak to one person I met on set who came up to me, he was a production assistant, and he said before he was hired on "New Amsterdam" he was homeless, he was an addict, recovering addict, and he said that he had no hope of getting out of his situation, and then he became a production assistant on "New Amsterdam." How that happened... I have no clue. I have no idea who hired him, but it made me grateful to work on this show, not from someone who's at the top, but as someone who's a part of the show, and I hope all of us feel a part of the show rather than some hierarchy: we're all just cogs in the wheel, and I was just grateful that he found his way to "New Amsterdam" and it made me proud to be a part of the show.

>> Ava Rigelhaupt: Thank you so much.

>> David Schulner: Thank you.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: We have time for one final question and I'm gonna give you a two-parter, kind of cheat on that a little bit: so first part is how has COVID-19 changed how you're working and if you had a crystal ball, what can you tell us about how the next production season will run, and the second question is what is continued progress for further disability inclusion and equity both in front of and behind the camera and how do you define that?

>> David Schulner: Good questions. Our process is, this is the writers room now for us, it's Zoom, so that has its own challenges. David, in terms of casting, we do - I mean, how do you feel that's gonna work in terms of self-tapes and how are you gonna be able to help actors with their auditions? Do you envision in-person Zoom sessions or do you feel like self-tapes with callbacks? We haven't even talked about this so this is good for us to talk about.

>> David Cap: Yeah, I think it's probably going to be a hybrid, David is what I think; certainly, we receive a lot of self-tapes anyway, pre-COVID, and we've actually cast actors from their self-tape. What I find exciting about this time right now, obviously with respect to everyone regarding illness and people who suffered loss from COVID and fiscal hardships, artistically what's exciting is that I think it's gonna level the playing field a little bit right now, because access to opportunity is going to be a little bit easier because if everyone is self-taping, right? So our outreach can be a little more extensive, we can be even hopefully more inclusive with who we're able to solicit tapes from: we do a lot of work in the audition room with actors because so many of the scenes from "New Amsterdam" obviously take place at such a high level like, the ER doors burst open and in comes BOOM! Yelling! Blah blah blah. So we do a lot of work in the room to try to scale the audition to the room, but at the same time giving enough of a hint of the stakes, so I do think some actors are still going to benefit from maybe some notes to a retake before we send them on to you David - some might be right out of the gate ready to go, and then I think if, depending on whether it's, say a guest recur or just a very big guest star, I imagine like an in-person Zoom session is gonna work: the last theater project that I was working on before everything shut down was Anna Deavere Smith play for the Signature called "Twilight" and we did callbacks via Zoom, and it's - I'm not sure what you've done yet David regarding if you've watched any auditions in this way, it's strangely intimate... and, it's intimate and it's new and exciting, even though nothing is ever going to be the same as the alchemy between someone being in the room with the actor, right? That's never gonna change - the alchemy between human and human in an actual room. But Zoom - I mean, even as we're all here now, we're all in our own spaces, like, I'm in my apartment, it's an immediate equalizer in some ways and I think it's gonna be trial-by-error, we're gonna figure it out as we go. Ultimately. Meandering answer, but who knows?

>> David Schulner: [ overlapping ] Not at all.

>> David Cap: I mean, we're all in the wilderness right now, right? We're all trying to fight our way through.

>> David Schulner: Yeah, and in terms of production, we're waiting on New York to tell us when we can start building new sets and when we can start filming and - safety's always will be our primary concern.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: So we're definitely excited to see what might come: as I mentioned before, "New Amsterdam" really has become an example of best practice and it's something that I use in the trainings that I do at various studios, through the hiring of people with disabilities and actors with disabilities, as well as working with consultants to ensure accurate storylines and include conversations about controversial topics within the disability community. If I may, I'll put a shameless plug that, if at any point, you're looking for writers with disabilities, many of the people in this lab are writers with disabilities who have various credits and I'm always glad to make introductions.

>> David Schulner: That's awesome.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: In our 2019 Lab, we were able to make that happen as well where some of our alumni were then later staffed on shows where they were looking to ensure that they were including folks with different types of disabilities as well. So apologies for that shameless plug but, figured -

>> David Schulner: It's not shameless at all, there's no other way that the rest of us are gonna know who's out there. This is so important on so many levels and, again, visibility and representation - it's essential, otherwise - I'm literally in my basement, [ Laughter ] I'm never gonna know who's out there.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Well, I just want to thank both of you for your openness, and for your desire to keep furthering the inclusion of folks with disabilities. I mean, as you know, 25 percent of adults in America have a disability, so it will be exciting to see as more and more shows really accurately reflect that on screen as well as behind the camera. So, we're really excited to see what next season will bring: we understand we're not sure exactly when next season will be, but it will be fun to watch when it comes to be. So thank you so much.

>> David Schulner: And, I also just want to say really quickly like, this is not social justice work - diversity equals better stories, studies have shown that diversity in the workplace equals better outcome. So, selfishly, hiring these actors, hiring these writers, hiring these directors - people with disabilities can only make our show and any show stronger, more exciting, showing different points of view - it's essential to art and it's essential to our society. so I just want to make clear this is selfish for us to make a better show.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: One of our board members is Jonathan Murray so he's on the kind of unscripted and documentary, but he talks about that all the time for all the Bunnim-Murray shows that, he's not doing anyone a favor but he's making more money for himself in his company by including people with disabilities. So, it's doing the right thing but it's also a win-win for everyone else.

>> David Schulner: Absolutely. Thank you, guys. Thank you, everyone.

>> David Cap: Thanks for having us, Lauren. Thank you, everybody.