

Actors Think Tank Meeting
September 22, 2021
Special Guest: Pete Chatmon, Writer/Director

Actors Think Tank on Wednesday, 9/22/21, had the privilege of having Writer/Director, Pete Chatmon, special guest.

The meeting began with the Actors Think Tank (ATT) members slating, followed by an introduction of Chatmon by ATT member, Craig Woolridge, his former neighbor and friend of over 20 years. Chatmon was congratulated for being a new dad.

Pete Chatmon has “a deft ability to balance both half hour single comedies and one hour dramas. He has directed episodes of HBO’s “Silicon Valley” and “Insecure”; Netflix’s “You” and “Atypical”; ABC’s “Grey’s Anatomy”, “Black-ish”, “A Million Little Things”, “Station 19”, “Mixed-ish”, and “Single Parents”; CBS’s “All Rise” and “The Unicorn”; Starz’ “Blindspotting”; FX’s “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia”; Free-form’s “Grown-ish”; TBS’s “The Last OG”; OWN’S “Greenleaf” and the Apple TV+ series “Mythic Quest.” He is slated for two episodes of Spectrum’s upcoming “Long Slow Exhale” as well as two season 2 episodes of HBO Max’s “Love Life”. His debut feature as writer/director, “Premium”, starred Dorian Missick, Zoe Saldana and Hill Harper and premiered on Showtime after limited theatrical run. Chatmon also wrote, produced and directed “761st”, a documentary on the first black tank batallion in WWII, narrated by Andre Braugter”, per IMDB.com

Woolridge met Chatmon through Chatmon’s mother. At the time Chatmon needed funding for his first film, “Premium.” Woolridge helped with the project and they remained in touch with one another. Woolridge called the friendship unconditional.

(3:35 p.m.)

Chatmon said he uses gut instinct regarding good collaborations. He complimented the thought the ATT members put into their slates. He said defining self is an important part of the acting journey, as well as, clarity in how to present oneself. Chatmon called a good website “home court advantage.” He stated that the acting journey is one of clarity and adaptability. Chatmon says in casting delineating movement is additional information about yourself.

(3:49 p.m.)

In casting, Chatmon looks for someone who has made a decision about the role. He likes asking the talent if they have any questions and getting additional perspective of the role from them. Chatmon says the actor can help the Casting Director make decisions about the role when they come into the audition with thought and accuracy. Chatmon stated that the actor should anchor and elevate the material. Chatmon used several analogies to illustrate this process and stated that DGA, Harris Barclay, said he doesn’t trust directors who cannot cook, as the director should use all tools available to them, as a cook does in someone else’s kitchen, yet they must (3:53 p.m.) also adapt and find themselves in the story. Chatmon said on some shows he can fry the turkey, some allow improv, some require questions within the first 24 hours, etc. This varies from show to show.

(3:57 p.m.)

In explaining the parallel between actor and director, Chatmon said the biggest difference is in TV. He said the same people have to hire him and he must be selected by all parties as actors are. Chatmon emphasized the importance of solid relationships, saying the more people you know, the more help you can get, as he experienced crowd funding for his films.

(3:59 p.m.)

Chatmon said a producer has more opportunity to get what he wants and is style for the audience. As a director, Chatmon can do things to transition scenes and build around scenes. He sees his role as director as a “defender of common sense for the audience.”

(4:02 p.m.)

Chatmon worked 15 years without pay. When asked by Rich Henkels how he evolved to a breakthrough, he explained his journey from graduating from film school at N.Y.U. in 1999, to the Sundance Film Festival, showing his film at 30 film festivals; to writing features; to making local films in his hometown of S. Orange, NJ; to raising over \$500 thousand dollars for his film; to being a mentor and faculty member at N.Y.U. between 1999 and 2005. In 2008 he won Tribeca, he then started his own production company with branded content; he had an 83 episode podcast. Chatmon said his focus was to build community around the production company. He said we can either complain or be happy. Chatmon explained how he saved money working on the Oprah project for Proctor and Gamble in 2014, which helped him to make the film, “Black Heart.” Chatmon said forget what others want you to do and be yourself.

(4:10 p.m.)

Chatmon said because only 7% of film are not directed by white males he participated in diversity awareness programs sponsored by HBO, Disney, Sony and NBC Universal, sharing with them what he desired to do in the industry. He introduced himself on his own terms, saying that his goal was to do half hour comedy.

(4:14 p.m.)

Chatmon shared that it is important to be happy with the journey; that one should get better along the way and maximize and appreciate the journey. He also said to relish what you’re doing; be clear about your passion and what you want. Be willing to pivot and redefine yourself.

(4:17 p.m.)

In explaining why he moved to Los Angeles, Chatmon said that between February 2015 and May 2017 he was living between NJ and LA. He acquired a manager after being in the Sony program and then got an L.A. agent, with whom he shared his vision. Chatmon asked his agent to set up meetings for him. When he was given the episode on “Black-ish” he moved to L.A. ABC hired him because of his awareness. The L.A. move resulted from Chatmon seeing a tangible element to his career.

(4:22 p.m.)

When asked by Rich Henkels how different it is directing short comedy to film, Chatmon said that he goes into detail in the book he has just written. He said no one tells of the creative things that keep you working. Quoting NBA player, Matt Barnes, Chatmon said actors have to determine what pieces are missing and where they fit in.

(4:26 p.m.) Chatmon asks himself how he can elevate the show. The director must find a way to fit into the comedy cast versus in film where the cast adapts to the director. An empty video village is a sign of doing a good job in TV.

Chatmon entertained questions from ATT members:

Lynia Love expressed to Chatmon that she had met him years ago and wished him the best.

Shelby Hightower asked Chatmon if he had ever seen an actor break down on set. He discussed actors over acting and various blocking scenarios.

(4:34 p.m.)

Justine Reiss asked Chatmon for feedback to help her son who is in the industry, as well as, feelings about improve. Chatmon loves improv, although he said it is not for everyone. For Justine's son, options include: film school, being the designer of his own curriculum, reading Chatmon's book, shooting his own content and finding a team to work with him, etc. Chatmon says there are many ways to learn and build skills.

Ana Hoffman asked how to work through fear and Chatmon explained how he constantly uses positive self talk to build himself up. He told ATT to look at what we are doing as an opportunity versus needing a job and to believe in yourself and be confident. (4:40 p.m.). Chatmon also cautioned against elevating people.

Marisol McIntosh asked how Spike Lee influenced Chatmon, to which he replied that it was because he saw the life he knew played out on screen. (4:42 p.m.).

(4:46 p.m.) – Final words from Chatmon were to have clarity of what you want; master the craft; stay abreast of what is happening in the industry; know industry changes; know that the business is an “AND” not “OR”. Know how to breathe and reset. Lose timelines. Know that the journey is unique to each person, so keep the fire lit and learn how to control yourself.

Note: The title of Pete Chatmon's book is: Transition: A Director's Journey and Motivational Handbook,” and it should be released at the end of 2021.

Respectfully submitted by,

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