WHAT TO WATCH: INFLUENCE TO SHAPE PLATFORMS FOR GOOD

Announcer 00:01

Please welcome the panel on "What To Watch," moderated by Curtis S. Chin, Chair, Senior Fellows, Senior Advisor, Milken Institute.

Curtis S. Chin 00:13

I feel like I was just here. Bhumi—so again hello—I feel I was just here. Again I want to say thank you, everyone, for joining us. So we thought again about this hour together. It's a mix of, one, clearly India is very much on the agenda, from Shefali's terrific work. We're going to almost do the same—we're going to talk a little about each person, how they built their careers and platforms, but also how they're using those platforms to talk about issues. So I want to begin—we'll begin, I guess, with each of you, talking a little bit about some of your work. And so first, I know you're not really supposed to ask now, "What are you wearing?" But how can you not ignore—Bhumi? And Bhumi said, actually you should ask me, because actually there's meaning to this. So Bhumi, we're going to talk about your career, but also—what a presence.

Bhumi Pednekar 01:15

You know, I'm glad we started the session with some fashion conversation, because I feel that's usually very ignored on platforms like so. To me, fashion is a form of self-expression, and it's very, very empowering. But I'm not going to speak very long on it. I'm wearing this beautiful creation by a designer called Rohit Bal. He's from India. This is an archival piece from him, and we lost him this year, so this is a bit of my tribute to his legacy.

Curtis S. Chin 01:49

Oh yeah, beautiful, beautiful, right? Let's begin. Let's begin first with you, Bhumi, and talk about your career. You know, I don't if you were able to listen in to a little bit about Shefali as she built her career, but it was also something—

Bhumi Pednekar 02:04

I followed her career. She's such an incredible actor, and I think what she's doing today is breaking so many stereotypes. That's exactly what I've tried to do in my decade-long career. We obviously belong to different times, and I think she, in many ways, has paved the path for an artist like me in India.

Curtis S. Chin 02:24

Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, one thing she said to me, you know, backstage, was she also turned down roles. And I think both of you—I want to bring both of you in as you talk about your careers. You turned down roles and made decisions that you thought helped advance what you were using your platform for. Bhumi, tell us about your first role. You began actually, I think, as like a casting agent. Did you—like, "I'm going to cast myself"? How did that—

Bhumi Pednekar 02:51

I wish it was that easy. It did not. So, just to give you a little perspective about how the films work in India—when I started off, there wasn't a division for casting, you know. It was just a lot of luck, and if somebody spotted you, etc. I always wanted to be an actor. I'm living my dream, every bit of it. But growing up, I didn't really see women like me on screen. I didn't feel seen, I didn't feel represented. So every time I told somebody within my circles that I wanted to act, I was made fun of. But that rejection—every time I heard a no—gave me a lot of fire. And I was like, I'm going to show you. I am going to do this. And I did. My first film was a beautiful film called "Dum Laga Ke Haisha." The film was about a girl who might not fit what your regular beauty standards are. She was a larger—a plus-size girl. I hate using that word, but for the sake of this audience that might not know my work, I'm just going to use it. She did not fit into the skeleton that the society makes where beauty standards are concerned. And it's a romance between a guy who's not educated, who hasn't achieved anything in life, but he always makes the girl feel lesser because she isn't your generic terms of what beautiful is. And she breaks all of those shackles, and she, by the end of it, is victorious. I think this is the best way that I can sum it up. But what was beautiful about that experience was that, yes, it gave me an opportunity to live my dream. But also what happened after that film released—it went on to become a huge success. But that's when I realized how powerful cinema can be. Cinema helps create empathy. It—in India, there's a lot of stigma, a lot of taboo around a lot of things that can't be spoken of. Cinema eases that conversation. And when empathy is turned into something actionable—to me that's advocacy. And that's how I use my platform. And my first film gave me clarity on the trajectory that I want to follow, and it gave me the courage to say no to many, many things that didn't fit into that bracket.

Curtis S. Chin 05:14

You know, I want to bring in Ross. So first, again, you've got to see their body of work. I'll show some photos later of some of the work. But, you know, I want it to be like a dinner conversation. And so Ross, it's also kind of weird—so I'm up late streaming both of them on tv last night as my homework for the session. And so, I saw Ross two days ago here, remember? And I— what should I watch? And you said, "13 Reasons Why." And I don't know if you know, but "13 Reasons Why" was one of the most discussed Netflix series in the US. And it's really—you know—I don't say it sounds horrific, but it's a little bit depressing. It's really about a high school and a teenage girl kills herself. And so the series—and it made like four seasons—begins with all kinds of warnings—if you're thinking about, you know, suicidal issues, maybe you don't want to watch this—or you should watch it with a parent and others. And the 13 Reasons—the character makes a tape for 13 people, pretty much. And it's like, this is how you contributed to my suicide. I mean, such a dramatic, powerful, much discussed story. Ross, tell us about your role, how that came about, and what did you think when you made that series, and you were younger then—

Ross Butler 06:36

Yes.

Curtis S. Chin 06:37

And so Ross, we were saying—some people say you're Singaporean-American, but it's really not right. He is born in Singapore, but he's really all-American. And he went to high school, like in my school district—but his mom is what, Malaysian-Chinese? And your dad is American—

Ross Butler 06:53

You really did all your homework.

Curtis S. Chin 06:55

I had to read so many articles and watch so much stuff. But isn't that more fun than reading about like quant, I don't know. So tell us about that role, and then we'll get back more into both of you in terms of the things you had to do to build these platforms. Ross—

Ross Butler 06:56

Sure. So in "13 Reasons Why," I was one of the reasons—which is a little depressing on my end—but I was seen as, like, one of the nicer of the—

Curtis S. Chin 07:21

He was the nicer—

Ross Butler 07:22

I was the nice reason for—

Curtis S. Chin 07:23

Misinterpreted —

Ross Butler 07:25

But no, I mean, you know, Bhumi, what you just said about how media helps break conversation, helps break the ice—that's exactly what this show did. Before "13 Reasons Why," there were not a lot of shows or movies that talked about mental health and helped parents talk to their kids about what was going on in high school. And the number one thing that brings me a lot of pride of being part of that was, to this day, no matter what country I'm in, I do have people come up and say, "You know, this show made me feel less alone." Because when you're a teenager and you're going through high school and maybe you're not the popular kid and maybe you don't fit the beauty standards, or you're not the muscular jock—you think you're the only person in the world that feels that way. And the fact that we were able to make a show that resonated around the world through Netflix, and that everybody from every culture was able to connect to it—that was a big source of pride for me, and I'm so happy that I was able to be a part of that. But leading up to that, when we talk about changing stereotypes and everything in Hollywood—we all know here that the portrayal of Asian men in Hollywood for 100 years hasn't been the best. We were either just martial artists or we had heavy accents, and we were engineers and we were IT people and that's about it. And there was one audition I went on, I'd say in 2015—it was a comedy, and I had to put on a very heavy Chinese accent for this comedic thing. And I went in just feeling so embarrassed that, you know, I was forced to put on this accent. And after I was done, I felt even worse. And I called up my agent, and I said, "You know, don't send me out for Asian auditions anymore. This is not how I want to represent myself or how I want to propagate the image of Asian men." And he said, "Oh, you know, that's probably not the best idea, like, you know"—and I said, "No. Just send me out for white, Black, Latin roles, whatever." And that's how I launched my career—cause then after that, I started playing— you know—you guys know the Archie Comics? So I played a character named Reggie Mantle, who—

Ross Butler 09:45

On Riverdale, yes—who is a white character in the comics. "13 Reasons Why"—he was a white character. I played a show as Zendaya's love interest as an Asian male. So the only reason that all happened was because I didn't want to follow any status quo. I didn't want to propagate something that did not resonate with me —and I just got lucky.

Curtis S. Chin 10:04

Riverdale—

Curtis S. Chin 10:06

Kudos to you. Bhumi, I was interested because there was one—I read so much about the two of you. There's a headline about you that—it said "the Queen of Stereotypes," and I thought, "Oh, that's the opposite of what, you know, you're trying to do." But as I read more about it, it's almost like a stereotype of you breaking stereotypes—you become the stereotype of the Queen of the Heartland. What does that even mean? Tell us about that.

Bhumi Pednekar 10:29

I mean, it's a very generic way of basically calling parts of India that are still not—I mean, they've not reached a Metro City status—

Bhumi Pednekar 10:29

You know, there's so much happening in India today. It's a melting pot of all amazing things. And as I mentioned earlier, I very early on decided that I want to portray different versions of what a modern Indian girl is. You know, she has ambition, she has desire, she wants love, she wants success, she wants money. And usually you're conditioned not to celebrate those things—and I was like, I'm gonna go out and I'm gonna celebrate them—because like me, any girl that's following my trajectory, or she watches my films—she needs to feel represented, because that's what you're also doing with your work. She needs to feel seen, she needs to feel like she has a voice, and she needs to know that it's okay to have ambition and it's okay to celebrate it. So the headline was more about—I love breaking stereotypes. I think it's something that gives me such joy. I love challenging the status quo. And honestly, I've made a career out of it. It's also a great strategy for me, because you earlier asked me why casting. I don't come from a background in cinema. Nobody in my family could have ever imagined that I would become an actor. And I did go ahead and do some really, really crazy things that they still can't believe. But in many ways, I think I have always led such an unconventional life that a lot of those choices resonate with the kind of cinema that I do and resonate with the choices that I make for myself. Like, I'm constantly asked—I'm 35— why aren't you married? You know, in India, they say, "When will you settle down?" I'm like, I am settled. I am independent. I have a beautiful family, I'm healthy, I'm happy. And I say this often when I'm on platforms like so—that people are very, very nervous around a happy girl, because she's so powerful. She's so powerful.

Curtis S. Chin 10:34

Still developing—

Bhumi Pednekar 10:38

Still developing rural parts of India. And I find a lot of pride in playing those characters, because my country is so diverse.

Curtis S. Chin 10:48

Absolutely.

Curtis S. Chin 11:12

Absolutely. You know, we were laughing earlier—you know—some of you might have been here, I think a couple years ago. We had a woman named Seema Auntie from Indian Match—on this like stage—a Netflix series—and she was such a big hit. But it was obviously all these sophisticated banker types—they're still asking, "Well, how can my son marry a good Indian girl?" I mean, it's like, aren't you all, like, advanced and all? But we were talking about—but that's India, too—the diversity of India. And I remember, Ross, something you had said, "Well, there are, to be honest, like nerdy people like me or engineers who happen to be Asian, but that shouldn't be the only Asian you see on screen." And it was interesting—well, I want to talk a little bit about some of the work you're doing in climate and UNDP—but I also asked Ross, "How are you using your platform?" It was interesting—it was almost a message to parents. Tell me a little bit about what you were telling me backstage.

Ross Butler 13:48

So yeah, I think the stereotypes of the engineers and the doctors and everything—that came out of a real-life thing about Asian immigrants coming to America, and they want their kids to be real professions, right? Want real professions. And for me—to give you some background, I went to Ohio State and studied chemical engineering, biomolecular engineering. That's something my mom wanted me to do. But one thing that I really want, especially in Southeast Asia, is to encourage parents to allow their kids to pursue creative pursuits. And not—that's not to say that they don't have to be doctors or businessmen or whatever, but it's just the encouragement of creative arts allows them to be more confident in their creativity, and the most successful people in every single industry are the most creative ones—the ones that are able to adapt, to think outside the box, break the status quo. So even if you allow your child to write screenplays, or go to acting class, or sing, it's more about the confidence in their choices. And that's really the biggest thing that I've—I'm proud of that I've done so far—is that I've had conversations with Asian parents, and they're like, "You know what? Maybe they can—maybe they don't have to be a doctor. Maybe, you know, you can be lucrative by starting your own brand or thinking outside the box." So that's—

Bhumi Pednekar 15:14

You know, I understand that so well, because what I said earlier that when I went and I told my family that I want to act, they're like, "What?" Because I come from a family of doctors and engineers and lawyers, and this is just something that they still can't digest. They still don't think this is a real thing. You know—

Curtis S. Chin 15:34

I—there's many parents here. Take that when your kid is saying, "Mom, I'm not going to Harvard. I'm quitting Ohio State at age 20 and taking an acting class that my friends had to pay for."

Curtis S. Chin 15:49

Yeah, I know.

Ross Butler 15:49

Yeah, my mom was not happy when I dropped out and moved out to LA, and she wasn't happy that my friend bought me—I started because my friend bought me an acting class for 25 bucks.

Ross Butler 15:49

I was just like "You know what? Anything but engineering. I'll take it."

Curtis S. Chin 16:02

Hey, I want to show a couple slides. Let's go. Let's go. Run through. Slide number three—you see?

Curtis S. Chin 16:11

So this makes that point that you were redefining stereotypes and breaking plateaus. Slide number—and that is, I know, bizarre, right? You can Google it. Slide number four. And so this is—

Curtis S. Chin 16:11

The body of some of your work. Tell us about it, because I like—I don't know—that one on the right, "The Royals," is kind of like, not about—empowering women. But tell us, what are these things we're watching here?

Ross Butler 16:11

Oh—

Bhumi Pednekar 16:37

That's my first film—

Bhumi Pednekar 16:38

That's my first piece of work, Dum Laga Ke Haisha. The English title for it was "My Big Fat Bride." I was about 100 kgs in my first film. I don't know how to convert that to pounds.

Ross Butler 16:52

100 kgs—so 120 pounds?

Bhumi Pednekar 16:54

120 pounds?

Ross Butler 16:56

No, *220* pounds.

Curtis S. Chin 16:57

Were you really 220 pounds or was that make-up?

Bhumi Pednekar 17:02

No, I was.

Bhumi Pednekar 17:03

It took me about a year to gain that weight, and my director did not start shooting until I reached that size, because she had to be that way as—so there was nothing wrong with her, and yet she was constantly made to feel lesser only because she was that body type. The second one is called “Saand Ki Aankh.” It was a biography on these two women that, at the age of 70, broke every kind of shackle that the society put on them because they belong to a small, little village in India that was completely infested by patriarchal systems. They broke that and I spoke to them—I had the opportunity of meeting them—and thank God I went through that experience, because I asked them—I was like, "Dādī"—Dādī means grandmother in Hindi. I was like, "Dādī, why did you do this?" It takes so much courage to kind of go against the systems created and go against your husbands and tell them, "I'm not listening to you." And they had to go through a lot. They are like "I did this because—I did it for my daughter." I wanted to make sure that we create an ecosystem for them where they did not have to follow the systems that we had to follow. They lived in a purdah for many, many years—and that was the first step when they got rid of it. It was honestly the best three months that I've spent in my life shooting—and that is “The Royals.” It released on Netflix this year. It is very away from the work that I have done, but I wanted to experiment with something more indulgent, fun. It's a romance—it's romcom. It has every kind of trope that the genre needs. And it was really, really well received. It was one of the only Indian shows that reached the top 10 globally. So—and it stayed on, and it was a lot of fun. It's a great choice of—

Curtis S. Chin 17:03

Oh, my God.

Curtis S. Chin 17:48

There is one article that talked about, you know—she’s the "Queen of the Heartland"—films about these strong, rural women and others. And then the headline was, “Oh, she’s breaking that stereotype, because she’s doing ‘The Royals.’” And your team said, "Oh, if you’re gonna watch three things, watch them in this sequence"—and the last is “The Royals.” So I watched “The Royals”—and it’s like—it’s not the Bridgerton, but it’s kind of like it—because it’s set in the modern era.

Bhumi Pednekar 19:20

It's a—

Curtis S. Chin 19:21

She’s like a CEO.

Bhumi Pednekar 19:22

She is, she is—a CEO for a unicorn. But look, for me, I don't want to be boxed. I don't want to be defined by a particular thing. I can't stop growing—

Curtis S. Chin 19:33

Absolutely—

Bhumi Pednekar 19:34

But my heart lies in stories that have impact and purpose. I've experimented, I've done different genres, but my heart lies when I know that my work has more than just entertainment. It's helping in changing a mindset. It's helping in uplifting communities—especially in my country. I wear my nationality as a badge of honor, and I really want to do everything in my capacity to make sure that I can help as many as I can in my country.

Curtis S. Chin 20:05

Absolutely. Ross, as you heard this—and yeah, I remember you said, "It's almost the opposite," where now you're coming—like you went from Asia all the way to the US. And now your goal—you want to use your platform to do things out in Asia as you're beginning to produce stuff—or tell us about some things you're working on right now as part of that.

Ross Butler 20:21

Yeah, so I've been spending a lot of time in Southeast Asia the last few months, because I still think there—this goes with what I was talking about before, about encouraging creativity in Southeast Asia. Because you see now, Korea is doing an amazing job with representing their culture, with K-Pop Demon Hunters being the number one watched movie on Netflix of all time. And that's because Korea had invested so much in entertainment education—in writing, directing, cinematography—and it's come to fruition a few decades later. So now, after being in the Hollywood system, I wanted to come here and encourage a lot of the countries and a lot of the cultures here to do the same thing. Because Korea is one country, and they're very diverse within it—but in Southeast Asia, we have so many cultures. We have so many mythologies, so many stories we can tell. And I think we're doing a disservice to ourselves to not collaborate and come together and put that together to broadcast to the world—because I think a lot of the world still sees Southeast Asia as third world.

Curtis S. Chin 21:29

What are you working on right now? Where—can you say or you're auditioning or—

Ross Butler 21:36

I have a couple films coming out, but mostly I have a few scripts that I'm producing—and I'm meeting with a lot of production companies here and also with Korean companies to do some co-production. So I'm just trying to grind out some some work.

Curtis S. Chin 21:49

I remember one thing you had said that was this notion of creative—entertainment can bridge. And this ideal—maybe there's a story of China and India—

Ross Butler 21:59

Yes—

Curtis S. Chin 21:59

Or the old Silk Road. Tell us a little bit. What were you thinking when you shared that with me?

Ross Butler 22:03

I mean—going back to the bit about how I think these—our communities and our cultures are so fragmented—so, speaking about India and China, they've had a border for time immemorial, and there has to be stories that happen between the two. But we don't see any. We don't see any romances, we don't see any action, we don't see any dramas that are just a mixing of these two cultures. But the thing is that—it's not that it doesn't exist—it's just we don't shine light. For instance, you know, in western China, you have—you can see mosques with Chinese writing on them. And these are natural fusions of culture and stories. I'm writing a show about the Silk Road—about, you know, these two guys going from Rome to China—and you get to meet the pre-Indians and the pre-Qatari tribes and the pre-Iranians. So these are all stories that we don't have to create out of thin air. They exist. And there are thousands of years of these stories that we can tell. And the thing that needs to happen for us to tell these stories is we have to collaborate—we have to come together and—and, you know—and there's so much potential. And yeah, now hopefully we can break it down.

Curtis S. Chin 23:10

Yeah—and so not to make news, but I had asked each of them—as we talked about bridging, you know, China and India—would you do a project together?

Bhumi Pednekar 23:22

Yes.

Ross Butler 23:24

Let's do it. Any ideas?

Curtis S. Chin 23:28

[Inaudible] Ross, Bhumi. Either, I don't know, romcom or murder? I don't know.

Bhumi Pednekar 23:33

I think—I think Ross would have that covered.

Curtis S. Chin 23:36

And actually, Shefali was like, "What about me? Don't count me out. I want to be, you know, in a film with these two people." Awesome.

Ross Butler 23:42

And we can break a bunch of stereotypes doing that too.

Curtis S. Chin 23:48

Hey, you know, the last few minutes, I want to come back to the work you're doing with the United Nations Development Program. You know, in our bio—when you look on our little website for this event—it describes, of course, "actress." But it also says "climate warrior, advocate." Tell us some of the work—I think you actually just came, sadly, I think, from a flooded area—a flood area in India. Tell us about that.

Bhumi Pednekar 24:12

I'm actually going to use this platform to speak about that a little. Large parts of India, and actually Southeast Asia, have been affected by damaging floods. I—this week was on ground working in an area called Jammu—it belongs to a state called Jammu and Kashmir. I don't know how many of you know of that area. And what I saw completely broke my heart—communities that have lost everything. Most of them belong to low-income groups. So imagine you've put in all your life savings into building this home—this beautiful house—your dreams. You work day and night to make sure that you can educate your children—and overnight, it's all gone. So how do individuals and families and communities rebuild from here? So we've—I have started a campaign, and I have some great collaborators that are doing incredible work in India around disaster relief. I have joined hands with them—where I want to use my platform to reach people far and wide. And we started a crowdfund exercise, where we are basically collecting funds, and we want to give them support—which would span from trauma relief—because what they've seen is something that needs—they need mental health support at this point—rebuilding their homes, giving them—at this moment, what is it that they need—from food to tents—because a lot of these communities are living in tents they have created. They don't have electricity. So from the smallest thing like schoolbooks to actually helping them rebuild their homes—that's something that I'm working on. And yes, I wanted to speak of this here today, because if there's anybody that might be interested in supporting them, all the information is available on my LinkedIn and Instagram.

Curtis S. Chin 26:10

Yeah, I was gonna say—each of them, unlike probably all of us who have like 500 followers—I don't know—it's like 12 million followers, 10 million followers on Instagram. And how are you going to then— you know, we talked about this upstairs—you know, the power of social media. There's so much negativity that people say about social media—but you can also use your social media for positive things.

Bhumi Pednekar 26:31

Absolutely, I think—and you know this especially—I would want to—to any of your viewers—to the young—to all young adults: I think there's a lot of validation attached to social media. The moment you move that to impact, it's one of the most empowering mediums we have today because generations before us did not have this. They did not have ways of connecting with just such a large platform. You know, I feel a lot of self-worth, especially for women—I'm so sorry, Ross, I'm just—I don't stop talking—I did tell him "Please cut me off"—

Curtis S. Chin 26:31

She gave me permission to shut her up.

Bhumi Pednekar 26:31

I'm like, you have to tell me, "Bhumi, ok"—

Ross Butler 26:52

I'm—listening to you like them [motions to audience]—I'm in awe, so I'm just—

Bhumi Pednekar 27:13

I truly feel that a lot of young girls—especially—a lot of their self-worth is attached to what the internet has to say to them. And I have gone through that experience. I'm not here—I'm not sitting here as somebody who's completely healed—but it's taken me a lot of time, because I have a very strong ecosystem that helped me bridge that gap. But to any young girls listening to me, all I want to say is that your self-worth and your value is not attached to what the internet has to say about you. So please don't let that impact you. But the internet—coming back to your question—can be very empowering, because I saw that during COVID. You know, during COVID where, in large parts of the world where the healthcare system completely crashed, I—we, along with the volunteers that we were, created networks of unknown strangers that went about creating help—from getting a bed in a hospital, to arranging medicine, to, like, doing these brilliant things—and that's the power of the internet.

Curtis S. Chin 28:16

Ross—thoughts on—you know—we probably have a lot of young people streaming and watching us. Do you have a message for people out in social media? Or do you have your thoughts yourself on social media—given some of your work—you know—it's about the teens and 20-something year-olds—

Ross Butler 28:31

Yeah, sure. I think with social media, it's a double-edged sword, right? It's—it has the power to give you access to unlimited information. If you want to learn any hobby—if you want to do anything—you can find it. What I'm worried about is using the algorithm to doom scroll—and you guys know what doom scrolling is—how you just go through hours and hours and hours watching reels. And what I'm worried about is that—with teens now—the thing with Instagram is you will see the best of the best things that are happening in the world in all your friends' lives and everybody else's lives. You'll see cats doing crazy stuff—and I think, unfortunately, what that's doing is—that's do—it's making the standard of life higher—as far as the expectations—about how everything needs to be a dopamine hit—everything needs to be something fantastic—and I think we should just encourage social media detox every now and then, or at least craft your algorithm to do something positive, whether it's learning or learning about different cultures. Because there are, like, travel bloggers out there, so you can really see a country like India—I watch a lot of India travel vlogs because I told you—I want to go so bad

Ross Butler 29:39

But I will find myself—you know, for hours just looking at cat videos, or whatever it is—and I'm just—and after, like, five hours have gone by—and it's, like, one o'clock in the afternoon, I'm still in bed—and I'm like, "What did I just do?" So, you know, I'm at fault myself—so it's um—I don't know what my commentary is, but just be careful of the doom scroll. I think just set a timer, set an alarm.

Bhumi Pednekar 29:40

I think it's time you visit us.

Ross Butler 29:41

I know—

Curtis S. Chin 29:42

See that's that project I'm encouraging. Ross, let's go to India.

Bhumi Pednekar 30:08

You know, sorry—just, just to add to what Ross was saying—I just feel like, as people that are in the public eye—because we have a large platform—it's very important for us to let your followers or your community know what you are when we're not on screen, or when you're not on a stage. I don't wake up like that, and I make sure that I put that out on my Instagram—because this is a beautiful point that you highlighted—you you only see the best of the best on social media. But I think as people that are looked—you know people look up to us—it's important for them to also see our vulnerabilities—the times we cry, the times we don't feel our best, that's something that I try doing through my platform.

Curtis S. Chin 30:53

You know, we've pretty much come to a close. I want to finish with something I asked Shefali Shah, and I want to ask you: for some of the people that don't know your work—now with streaming, you have access and so many ways to—work that's from all around the world, from years ago. For each of you, if there's one piece of work that you've done that you think—that if they haven't seen, what should they see? And if there's something that's not your work—that you recommend people read or take a look at. Bhumi—now you're speechless.

Bhumi Pednekar 30:54

That's so tough. That's difficult.

Curtis S. Chin 31:05

Okay, your work? What—of all those things we showed and some we didn't even spot—what should they see?

Bhumi Pednekar 31:21

Okay, because you've already mentioned some of my pieces—something that wasn't spoken of was a film called "Badhaai Do." That was—that was a story from the LGBTQIA+ community—a beautiful love story about liberation, freedom, love, and I feel that's such a common thread—that's such a universal theme. I think that's something that I would really, really like people to see—because the film just speaks of compassion.

Curtis S. Chin 32:07

What's it called? What's the name again?

Bhumi Pednekar 32:07

Badhaai Do. Badhaai Do.

Curtis S. Chin 32:07

How do you spell it?

Curtis S. Chin 32:14

B-A-D-H-double A-I space D-O.

Curtis S. Chin 32:19

Okay, you got enough words—when you type it into Netflix—the rest—I hope will fill out. And what about not your work?

Bhumi Pednekar 32:28

Mr. Satyajit Ray.

Curtis S. Chin 32:29

What's it called?

Bhumi Pednekar 32:30

Mr. Satyajit Ray. He was a director of the ages—the first time a film from India that went on to Cannes was a film called “Pather Panchali”—I don’t remember the year, but I think it was before the 1950s. And I feel his work is not celebrated enough. A lot of international directors have actually taken inspiration from his work—and you must, must—and so should you—because, you know, you are an artist—you'll just enjoy what he did back then. Because again, his themes were about compassion, liberation, freedom—breaking patriarchal chains and systems—and he's just so brilliant.

Curtis S. Chin 33:13

Beautiful. Ross, what piece of your career's work should people see?

Ross Butler 33:19

If you guys haven't watched “13 Reasons Why,” it really is the work—the piece of work that I’m most proud of. Again, from an acting point of view, it’s great, but if you guys have kids, it's—seriously—I get emotional just thinking about all the parents I've talked to and the kids I’ve talked to, about how it’s just made them feel less lonely—or that parents have been able to break down the barriers of conversation with their children about depression and what goes on in their schools—so—and honestly, it’s just a very entertaining show, like—the first season is an amazing mystery, so it just kind of brings that all together. For a piece of work that's not mine, on the complete opposite end of the spectrum, has anyone seen Train to Busan? It's a Korean zombie movie. And the reason I say this—because I think this resonates with what I want to say about mixing cultures and mixing mythologies is they took the idea of the American zombie and they put it in the culture of Korea. And that’s how Korea has, I think, taken leaps and bounds as far as cross-cultural entertainment—cause they also did a show called “Kingdom”—which is taking zombies and putting them in their medieval Joseon period. It’s such interesting stuff—so you know—if you want a prime example of how these cross-mythologies work—and how they're successful financially and entertainment-wise—"Train to Busan.” I think there's also a sequel—

Curtis S. Chin 34:39

Yeah, I saw.

Ross Butler 34:40

“Train to Busan.” “To.” T-R-A-I-N [laughs]

Curtis S. Chin 34:47

I've seen—I have to see the ones you recommend—but I've seen both of them and they are pretty stunning, right? It's like zombies on a train—it's like Snakes on a Plane—it's zombies on a train. You gotta see it.

Curtis S. Chin 34:59

It's pretty incredible. Hey, I'd love you all to give a hand to our two special guests. [Applause] Ross, Bhumi, thank you so much. Again, we'd be delighted to have you back. We do events all around the world, and we are about bridging and engaging and having these kinds of conversations about very important issues and encouraging—whether you're a business leader, academic, or someone in the world of entertainment, use your platforms for good. Help build more meaningful lives, get things done, in addition to just making great content, hopefully making a lot more money we talked about, because the world is changing. And one last call to action beyond supporting some of the things that you both spoke about— flood victims in India—there's a lot of stuff online—that was UNDP, but other organizations are also very much. And we'll probably hear from you more in the future about some of your own philanthropic foundation work. So that's a preview. And then likewise, Ross, we hope to see more of you out here. Not that we don't want you back in Virginia, but that you're spending more time here regularly, with this goal again of telling stories from Southeast Asia. And that will include partnering with some of you. And like today, we had the former head of the Motion Picture Academy—and she's focused on raising money to tell more Asian stories and more Asian American stories. So I hope both of you will be part of that effort. Thank you so much. [Applause]

Ross Butler 34:59

Yeah.