

Episode 127: : "An Actor's Craft: A conversation with Tony LoBianco"

Speaker 1: [00:04](#) Welcome to the Bill Walton Show, featuring conversations with leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, and thinkers. Fresh perspectives on money, culture, politics, and human flourishing. Interesting people, interesting things.

Bill Walton: [00:24](#) Welcome to the Bill Walton Show. I'm Bill Walton. During the last several years, I've had the extreme pleasure of getting to know an excellent actor, Tony LoBianco, who's been active in films, TV, and the stage. he's made over 100 films during the course of his career, and he's won an Obie, an Emmy, an Outer Circle Critics Award, and was nominated for a Tony award for Best Actor. You might remember him, he played Sal Boca in the iconic French Connection, and we've also... He got his career started in the cult classic The Honeymoon Killers, which is one of my favorites. He's here today because it's the 50th anniversary of The French Connection, and we were looking for a reason to get together, so we said, "Why don't we have an anniversary party and talk about that and everything else that Tony's done?"

Bill Walton: [01:19](#) What I really want to dig into, Tony, though, is he's a craftsman. He's a serious artist, and he's known for his transformations. And I'm interested in how he approaches the actor's craft and how he works with other actors and what the differences are between acting on the stage or on TV or in film. Tony, welcome.

Tony LoBianco: [01:40](#) Thank you. Thank you, Bill.

Bill Walton: [01:41](#) Delighted we finally made this happen.

Tony LoBianco: [01:43](#) Yes. Yeah. Great.

Bill Walton: [01:44](#) There's so many places... We've been talking about entry points for your career, which has been long and storied. You really came out of the box of very strong with The Honeymoon Killers, and that was your first feature film. You'd been on the stage for almost a decade by the time you made.

Tony LoBianco: [02:04](#) Yes, yes.

Bill Walton: [02:05](#) So, talk about The Honeymoon Killers, and then we'll go from there.

Tony LoBianco: [02:09](#) Well, that was the... You said the stage. And I had a theater that I was the artistic director of and the founder of Quality Triangle Theater in New York City in the '60s. And an actress said to me, "There's a movie being cast. You should go see about it." So, I called over there, and they said, "how old are you?" And I said, "22," three, whatever it was then. And she said, "Oh no, no, no, you're much too old. And we only want to see Spanish speaking people." So, I didn't bother.

Tony LoBianco: [02:44](#) So, the actress said to me, "You know, they still haven't cast that part. You should go up there," so I went up. And she said, "what are you doing here?" I said, "I want to audition for that part." She said, "No, I told you." I said, "Just a minute." So, I turned in my chair, put my hand on my hair, turned back to her, pushed my hair back, and spoke to her in a Spanish accent. And she said, "Oh, oh my God, let me bring you in." So, I went into the producers, never spoke to them without the Spanish accent. Okay? Got the part. Okay? Got the part. Then they asked me to cast the woman. And so, we was going by, and one of the producers said, "You think we can send him to school to learn to speak English?" The casting woman said-

Bill Walton: [03:34](#) So, you were in character the whole time playing [crosstalk 00:03:36].

Tony LoBianco: [03:36](#) Yeah. Right. Because I know producers' minds. The doubt was... So, then the woman said, "I got to tell you, he doesn't have an accent." And so, the guy said, "Oh, speak to us about the accent," and I said, "No, sir, not until I sign the contract." And I never did, never spoke to them without the accent until I signed the contract.

Bill Walton: [03:36](#) And this was in The Honeymoon Killers.

Tony LoBianco: [03:59](#) Honeymoon Killers, because I got the part, when I got the part.

Bill Walton: [04:02](#) Now, they cast Shirley Stoler in that part, who was notorious.

Tony LoBianco: [04:07](#) Yeah, she was great.

Bill Walton: [04:08](#) And I love the description of this movie on IMDb, which is the movie website, "An obese, embittered nurse doesn't mind if her toupee-wearing boyfriend romances and fleeces other women, as long as he takes her along for the ride."

Tony LoBianco: [04:25](#) Well, it's almost true. She promises-

Bill Walton: [04:29](#) Did I get it right, or is that... Almost. Okay.

Tony LoBianco: [04:31](#) Almost. She makes him promise that he will not have sexual relations with other women because she's very jealous of him, and she goes along posing as his sister, which is a little ridiculous when you think of what she looks like and what he looks like. And know what the interesting thing about that movie? It's a true story. In fact, I love doing true stories, as is The French Connection. And the idea of when they were finally caught at the end of the movie and put on trial, because he murdered a lot of women and she helped, and what he would do, he'd romance them, answer these lonely heart letters with the women, romance them, and if they caused a problem, he'd knock them off. It was just his job. You see?

Tony LoBianco: [05:22](#) So, she knew about that. She was one of the lonely hearts. But she fell in love with him, and he said, "I'll scare her off, and I'll tell her who I am and what I do." She said, "I don't care. I love you anyway." He's never had that, so he takes her along and she poses as his sister and they go on and do these crimes and get the money and so on. But she's very jealous of him. You see? So, anyway, it's a wonderful film, and it has become, as you said, a cult classic.

Bill Walton: [05:56](#) We have a clip from that.

Tony LoBianco: [05:57](#) Oh, okay.

Bill Walton: [05:59](#) And I think it's time to look at that.

Speaker 4: [06:01](#) [inaudible 00:06:01] another woman [inaudible 00:06:01] in here. Christ almighty, I'm earning my 4,000 tonight. Call this place [inaudible 00:06:12]. What a joke. One little jail after another with 10 feet of glass between them. [inaudible 00:06:21] I hate it here.

Tony LoBianco: [06:28](#) It's so funny. You know, it's funny, I was cast in a play, a [Herb Gardner 00:06:33] play, with Milton Berle, playing his son. You see? And at the same time I was doing this movie. And Herb Gardner, who's the writer director, I said to him, "I have a movie to do." He said, "Well, can you ask them to let you out of a day shooting to come for the first reading with a play with Milton Berle and Brenda Vaccaro?" I said, "Okay." I got back there. So, now I'm at the table for the first reading with Milton Berle, and I'm Raymond Fernandez from The Honeymoon Killers. You see? [inaudible 00:07:07]. And so, Milton says, "Who's this?" And he says, "Well, he's playing your son." "Oh. Oh, oh." So, I knew I

was in trouble immediately, of course. Now Milton, he does... We're doing just the reading of the thing. Milton's performing, the first reading, and everybody else was dogging it just reading it to get to know it. But Milton, at the end-

Bill Walton: [07:30](#)

He's playing it full out.

Tony LoBianco: [07:32](#)

He's playing it full out, and [inaudible 00:07:33] at the end of the reading, he gets up, he goes up the stairs, and does an exit. So, I went back, did the movie. It was a week later. And I said [inaudible 00:07:47] one scene on the stage with Milton, so I call back and I said, "Okay, I'm finished with the movie. I'm coming in." They said, "Don't hurry." I said, "What?" He said, "Well, we got to that scene, and your understudy went on, and he looks more like Milton Berle than you do." I said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. You cast me, you can't do this."

Tony LoBianco: [08:09](#)

I came back, spoke to Herb, I said, "Herb, come on. What are you doing?" I said, "You can't strike me out on the bench. I mean, you cast me the part. I transformed into this person when you cast me. Now, I'm doing that role, now I'll come back and transform." He said, "Milton has given me a lot of problems," and blah, blah, blah. So, I said, "Just give me 10 minutes, and I will transform back into that role." He says, "Tony, I'm having a problem." He said, "I'll talk to you tomorrow." I said, "Don't tell me, you're talking to me tomorrow. Tell me you're going to give me that 10 minutes." And he said, "I'll call you tomorrow." He calls me tomorrow, he says, "I got to go with my instincts. I got to go with the other guy." I said, "Okay, here's what I'll do. I'll understudy that part that you just took away from me." He said, "You have to do that. You're the standby for the other part, the [inaudible 00:09:00] part, which is a big part." I said, "I want to do it."

Tony LoBianco: [09:03](#)

Anyway, the play goes on. We have rehearsal, rehearsal, rehearsal, I transform into this character again. They keep saying, "Who's that guy? Who's that guy?" So, now what happens is they're doing a in-town run through before we go out of town with everybody from New York. You could imagine who's in that audience. They say to me, "Can you come in and audition?" I said, "Yeah." So, that night, that night, I come in, we're doing a 7:00 o'clock curtain for all these people, Harold Prince, you name, Mike Nichols, Elaine [inaudible 00:09:39], everybody you can imagine in New York is the audience tonight. So, I do the thing, and they say, "Gee, that's wonderful. Can you do it tonight?" No rehearsal, nothing. I said, "Sure." I said, "One thing is wrong." He said, "What?" I said, "I don't like the way you directed the scene." He said, "What do you mean?" I said,

"Well, this was this way." He said to me, "Okay, do what you want to do. Do what you want to do, but keep out of the way of Milton Berle. That's a direction." So, I go into Milton, I said-

- Bill Walton: [10:09](#) So, your only direction was, "Keep out of the way of Milton Berle."
- Tony LoBianco: [10:12](#) Keep out of the way of Milton Berle. So, I go into the room, Milton's getting made up, and I said, "Milton, I'm your son tonight. Let me hear your voice." He said, "What? What?" He says couple of lines. Back and forth, back and forth. Okay. Now, during the middle of the scene, there's a pause. In front of everybody, he turns to me and he says, "Are you going to say the line, or are we going to bring down the curtain?" The stage your manager says, "He's not up, Milton. You are. It's your line." And he throws him the line. After the scene, Milton comes out in his robe, and he says to the audience, "I'm very sorry. I'm sorry I said that to the kid. The kid is okay. It was my fault. And I bet you never thought you'd hear Milton Berle apologize."
- Bill Walton: [10:57](#) Well, the question is, did you really want to look like a young Milton Berle? What does that look like?
- Tony LoBianco: [11:02](#) Well [inaudible 00:11:03] play the role.
- Bill Walton: [11:07](#) Well, you were desperate for the part, but then you told them they had to redirect the scene. So, then after The Honeymoon Killers, did you go directly to The French Connection?
- Tony LoBianco: [11:18](#) That's another story. What happened was in playing with a Spanish accent, when Phil Dantoni, the producer, and Billy Friedkin, the director, saw that movie, it's one of their favorite films, they said, "Why don't we get him?" They said, "He's Spanish. He's got a Spanish accent." Luckily, the casting guy said, "No, no, he's a New Yorker. He doesn't have a Spanish accent." That's how I got that part.
- Bill Walton: [11:43](#) We'll get a clip from that. I think I'll see if we can't get that teed up here.
- Speaker 5: [11:48](#) It's just that my people think we ought to find a better time to make the switch. That's all.
- Speaker 6: [11:54](#) It has to be by the end of this week.
- Speaker 5: [11:57](#) [inaudible 00:11:57]. You got to be reasonable.

Speaker 6: [12:00](#) It's your problem.

Speaker 5: [12:02](#) Well, it's your problem too.

Bill Walton: [12:05](#) And you're playing that scene with Fernando, right?

Tony LoBianco: [12:06](#) Yes. Yes. And here's how that scene came about. I can tell you a story about everything. All you got to do from a director is ask me where I would be or what I would do. That's what you got to do. So, he said to me, "Where would you be in this scene?" I said, "Here's what I'll be doing [crosstalk 00:12:24]."

Bill Walton: [12:24](#) This is Billy Friedkin.

Tony LoBianco: [12:25](#) Friedkin. Now, he's not a-

Bill Walton: [12:26](#) No, he was a tough guy.

Tony LoBianco: [12:28](#) Tough guy. He said to me, "Okay." I said, "I'll be sitting on that bench, the limousine will drive down this street, I'll get up, we'll go there, and of course you want to see the Capitol, right? So, we'll do a walk and talk down this street here, and you can do a dolly shot and do the shot." And then he said to Sonny Grasso, one of the main detective's story The French Connection is, with Eddie Egan, he said, "Where will you be?" And Sonny Says, "Well, I'll be over here by the car." And I said, "No, no, no, Sonny. You know where you are? You see those steps way over there? You're sitting on those steps, and you have binoculars, eating your lunch and you see us through binoculars." And Billy says, "That's the way we're doing the scene. Send out for binoculars."

Tony LoBianco: [13:16](#) That's how that scene begins. I love the creation of director and actor working together and coming up with the best possible thing that the director will agree upon. See, I always believe that I am for the best performance, I don't care who it is. If have a better actor than this one or me or them, go.

Bill Walton: [13:41](#) You're watching the Bill Walton Show, and I'm here with Tony LoBianco, who's explaining that he's an incredible risk taker. He's already described how he's directing Billy Friedkin in his movie, which is always risky. And then, you also took on Milton Burle. So, you were talking about [crosstalk 00:14:00]. You had an innate sense of drama, yet you didn't really... You started out as a Golden Gloves boxer, and then you were a great baseball player. And I understand you [crosstalk 00:14:13] tryout with the Dodgers.

Tony LoBianco: [14:14](#) Dodgers, yeah.

Bill Walton: [14:15](#) So when did this athlete, this guy from Brooklyn, this athlete, discover he was an artist?

Tony LoBianco: [14:21](#) Well, I think those two things are performances. I think the idea of... It happened in high school. A teacher that inspired me and I did a contest, and won this and won that, doing Cyrano de Bergerac of all things from a vocational high school.

Bill Walton: [14:41](#) [inaudible 00:14:41] is not quite there.

Tony LoBianco: [14:45](#) Oh, sir, you could have said many things.

Bill Walton: [14:50](#) Okay.

Tony LoBianco: [14:50](#) It's fun.

Bill Walton: [14:51](#) So, continue. Yes.

Tony LoBianco: [14:52](#) So, anyway, so she inspired me, and after I graduated high school, what was I going to do? That was the best thing I had done. I couldn't make it as a professional baseball player, which I would have loved. I'm a big fan of baseball. And I did win eight championships as a softball. I had my own softball team in a Broadway show league. I was the pitcher and the manager. It's funny, before you mentioned about the directing Billy Friedkin, not at all. What it is, is the best idea, if you come up with a better idea... When I'm directing, and I've directed a feature film and five television shows, when I'm directing, I want the best suggestion. If you have a better idea than I do, oh, please tell me, please. I beg you.

Tony LoBianco: [15:45](#) And from actors, I don't care if it came from the janitor. I don't care who comes up with the idea. I'm the other actor, too, when I think of Honeymoon Killers, Larry Cohn came to me with a play about a Jewish homosexual genius, and he wanted me to play this role. After seeing The Honeymoon Killers, playing Raymond Fernandez with accent, and I said to him, "How do you have that knowledge to know that you're going to cast me as this." He said, "I know." I said, "I don't believe you. I don't believe you." I said, "Tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to cast this part for you. I'm going to get other actors to come and audition for the part you want to give me. Now, I want that part. I want to do that part, but I want to make sure you believe in what you're saying and what you see in me."

Bill Walton: [16:40](#) Why did you do that?

Tony LoBianco: [16:41](#) Because I want him to say at the end... I gave him four or five actors, okay? And they auditioned. I said, "So, what do you think?" He said, "Well, they're going to give me what they got. You're going to give me something else."

Bill Walton: [16:55](#) Well, the way I interpret that, also, is that you wanted the director to know he wanted you. I mean, if a director's not sure whether you're the right guy, that's going to affect your performance, and so you got to be both committed to you and the role.

Tony LoBianco: [17:07](#) Yeah. I want-

Bill Walton: [17:09](#) Was that the point?

Tony LoBianco: [17:10](#) That's part of it, and also, I wanted to make sure, yes, I wanted to make sure that the mystery of him... I wanted to know how he knew that I could do that role. Was it an insight in him? He said, "They're going to give me what they already got. You're going to give me something else as an added thing, and that is what..." I said, "Okay. Exactly."

Bill Walton: [17:36](#) I've got my own story there. I was taking an acting class in college. I had gotten back from the Army and I was doing various things. I took an acting class because I was involved in it when I was in the Army. And my teacher of the class said, "I'm going up to Indianapolis to direct the civic theater up there, and I know I've got just the part for you." I'm thinking, "Is this Brando, or is this something else." He says, "I want you to play a little Donnie Dark in Butterflies are Free." So, I was typecast then, but I did pretty well, but I didn't do quite what you ended up doing. So, we talk about overnight success in acting, as I'm doing the math here, you were almost 32, 33 years old when you did your first feature film.

Tony LoBianco: [18:24](#) About 30. Yeah. 30 [inaudible 00:18:26].

Bill Walton: [18:26](#) And how'd you get through the scuffling years of your 20s?

Tony LoBianco: [18:30](#) All theater, all theater, and that's where I breathe. I'll give you another inspirational story. When I was in acting school, Arthur Miller, the great Arthur Miller-

Bill Walton: [18:46](#) Acting school where?

Tony LoBianco: [18:48](#) In the Dramatic Workshop on Broadway and 50th Street.

Bill Walton: [18:51](#) Okay.

Tony LoBianco: [18:52](#) Where Capitol Theater used to be. And Arthur Miller came and he brought a scene from A View from the Bridge, and he had these two kids do the scene. I looked at that scene at 18 years old, and I said, "I am going to do that play on Broadway one day." So, that was 1954, and 1982-

Bill Walton: [19:21](#) 1954 you'd be 18 years old.

Tony LoBianco: [19:23](#) Yeah.

Bill Walton: [19:24](#) Okay.

Tony LoBianco: [19:25](#) And in 1983, I'm doing that play on Broadway with Arthur Miller, and I'm the first actor ever to do the play as a full length play on Broadway, The View from the Bridge. It was done as a one act play with Van Heflin and J Carrol Naish way back in the '40s. But I'm the first actor to play that play.

Bill Walton: [19:51](#) And you get nominated for a Tony.

Tony LoBianco: [19:52](#) A Tony, and Arthur Miller was very pleased [crosstalk 00:19:55].

Bill Walton: [19:55](#) And you won the Outer Critics Circle Award.

Tony LoBianco: [19:56](#) Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, it's a dream come true. It's the role of my life. In fact, you'll love this, I said to Arthur Miller, "I wish I was with you when you wrote this play." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because you forgot one thing." I'm talking to Arthur Miller now, right? The great Arthur Miller, Death of a Salesman-

Bill Walton: [20:20](#) The very formidable Arthur Miller.

Tony LoBianco: [20:22](#) To say the least.

Bill Walton: [20:22](#) Yeah.

Tony LoBianco: [20:23](#) He said, "Why?" I said, "The scene when Eddie is talking to the lawyer about Rodolfo, this kid, who's going to marry his niece, which is very... And he comes up with all these excuses to the lawyer why he shouldn't marry." I said, "You forgot that they're first cousins." Miller said, "Oh my gosh, you're right."

Bill Walton: [20:47](#) So, you knew his characters better than he did?

Tony LoBianco: [20:49](#) He said, "Put it in. Write it in." He said to me, he said to me, "Write it in." I said, "I'm not going to write it in, you're Arthur Miller. Write it in?" He said, "No, you go to the stage manager and you tell him you can put that line in there." I couldn't do it. Because I'm a protector of the lines when it comes to great plays. I'm the policemen. You got to say every word that's written in theater. It's different in the movies, but in the theater, with an Arthur Miller classic play, of which I spent my life wanting to do... Again, 1940 something behavior. You have to behave in the period. I'm a big fan of watching old movies. I don't want to invent the wheel. You see? History is our teacher.

Bill Walton: [21:48](#) Well, on that line, you're known for your transformations, and you've already talked about your role as a Spanish speaker that you just on the spot did. Now, you've brought along a book here with some photographs that I think illustrate this. I'd love to take a look at a couple of those just to talk about what it is you do, what happens inside that changes you from one character to the next.

Tony LoBianco: [22:16](#) Well, this is a role that I did in 1983, so how old was I then? And now that, let me see... Is it okay-

Bill Walton: [22:30](#) '83, you'd be 48, I think, or something like that. '83, you'd be 50. Yeah. Is that [crosstalk 00:22:36]?

Tony LoBianco: [22:30](#) Okay.

Bill Walton: [22:36](#) Okay. I think that's got to be just fine.

Tony LoBianco: [22:39](#) [inaudible 00:22:39] Fiorello LaGuardia. That whole face, there's no makeup. Now, that's hard to believe. That's my jowls, that's so on and so forth. I am wearing padding for the rest of the body, but that's it. That's one role. And here's another role that-

Bill Walton: [22:57](#) Now, you gained a lot of weight for that part?

Tony LoBianco: [23:01](#) Right now, I'm 165. I was 189. Same weight I was for [inaudible 00:23:06].

Bill Walton: [23:07](#) That's a lot.

Tony LoBianco: [23:07](#) Yeah. Now, this is the same character in FIST. This is a character 20 years later. Is it okay for [inaudible 00:23:15]? With Sylvester Stallone, Babe Milano. It's 20 years later.

Bill Walton: [23:23](#) Okay. So, the one with the mustache, you're how old?

Tony LoBianco: [23:27](#) Gosh, I don't remember.

Bill Walton: [23:28](#) Okay. And then-

Tony LoBianco: [23:30](#) Yeah. And then 20 years later in the same film.

Bill Walton: [23:34](#) Okay. Okay. Same part.

Tony LoBianco: [23:37](#) Same part. Just a few years later

Bill Walton: [23:38](#) Same film [crosstalk 00:23:39]. Okay.

Tony LoBianco: [23:38](#) Yeah.

Bill Walton: [23:40](#) Yeah.

Tony LoBianco: [23:40](#) Let me just show you-

Bill Walton: [23:42](#) And do you do all your own makeup, or do you have-

Tony LoBianco: [23:43](#) Yeah, I do my own.

Bill Walton: [23:44](#) Okay.

Tony LoBianco: [23:45](#) Well, most of it, I do my own makeup, but sometimes I get help with [inaudible 00:23:50]. Oh, here. Now, this is the most interesting one for me. Now, here's me at 21 years old. I'm in an acting school. I'm 21 years old here. And as you can see, the vest that I'm wearing and the tie you see, I turn into... That's backstage. And I turn into this.

Bill Walton: [24:17](#) On purpose. Now, did that look like Milton Berle's son?

Tony LoBianco: [24:22](#) I'm playing Mr. Zero in Elmer Rice's Adding Machine, a play written in 1929. See? And that's transformation, and all the makeup that's on there is only lines and highlight. Here's no noses, there's no putty, There's no anything, it's just highlighted with pencil, and that's all that is. I even put a beauty mark on him.

Bill Walton: [24:52](#) Well, it sort of succeeded in making him beautiful. Not all the [inaudible 00:24:56]. We were talking about being authentic to the time and place and of the character. You've got into a discussion with Richard Gere, I think, when you're making Blood Brothers. Let me do a clip from that.

Tony LoBianco: [25:08](#) Okay.

Bill Walton: [25:09](#) I want you to tell the Richard Gere story.

Speaker 7: [25:11](#) People [inaudible 00:25:13]?

Speaker 8: [25:13](#) A recreational assistant.

Speaker 7: [25:17](#) Recreational assistant is woman's work.

Speaker 8: [25:19](#) Oh, right. Sorry. I'm very sorry. I should wear work boots and a hard hat, then I'll be a real man, right?

Speaker 7: [25:26](#) Don't you fucking talk that way to me. A man who don't take pride in his work, don't take pride in himself.

Bill Walton: [25:34](#) That's terrific.

Tony LoBianco: [25:35](#) Thank you.

Bill Walton: [25:35](#) So, Richard Gere wanted to pronounce something one way and you thought he should do it another?

Tony LoBianco: [25:40](#) Well, I'm just generally a stickler for, as you could imagine, for authenticity. So, when an actor is pronouncing in a period piece, in a neighborhood, in a city that speaks this language, you certainly come in and say a different accent unless it's in the script that you're coming from somewhere else. Playing my son. So, anyway, I mean, actors do that. Again, period and place, that's why I'm not such a big fan of the casting as they're trying to do now, when a Black woman comes on stage and she has four white kids, without any explanation in the script. I'm stunned because as an audience, I want to know how that happened. Is that not important in the script? You take me out of the story.

Bill Walton: [26:48](#) That happened in Bridgerton, that Netflix series about the... I can't remember what... Regency period in England where they had that... It takes you out of the story-

Tony LoBianco: [26:59](#) Of course.

Bill Walton: [27:00](#) ... because you're trying to figure out what does it mean?

Tony LoBianco: [27:02](#) You telling me to be blind and not understand what... Everything I do, every move I make on a stage or in a movie is calculated, to mean something. And when I'm directing, you find, if you do a hand movement, if you're going to do this, so on and so... It's for a purpose. So, when you bring something

unusual on a set just because you want to be [inaudible 00:27:33] have to do with some kind of political something, social stuff, it doesn't make any sense. And they're instigating that now in the Academy Awards. There's a whole thing [crosstalk 00:27:46].

Bill Walton: [27:46](#)

Yeah. What is that about?

Tony LoBianco: [27:46](#)

Well, they want a certain amount of Black people, certain amount of Puerto Rican, certain amount of... have to be included in the production. How does that have to do with anything about a kind of movie you want to make that has nothing with that period? In other words, you're not allowed to make a play that didn't have Blacks at this time where the Blacks would behave this way, or the minorities were not in the realm. I don't understand it. But they're doing that in the Academy Awards now, in terms of making a movie.

Bill Walton: [28:21](#)

You're watching the Bill Walton Show. I'm here with Tony LoBianco, and we're talking about casting choices that are made today and what diversity means to movies and playing roles.

Tony LoBianco: [28:34](#)

That's for sure.

Bill Walton: [28:37](#)

Well, there's a movie I also wanted to talk with you about you. You were in there with Demi Moore and Alec Baldwin and James Gandolfini.

Tony LoBianco: [28:44](#)

Gandolfini.

Bill Walton: [28:46](#)

Gandolfini. Yeah. So, great cast. Let me play the clip from that so we can... It's a really interesting film you made with a great cast.

Speaker 9: [28:56](#)

[inaudible 00:28:56] do you know?

Speaker 10: [28:56](#)

Not for a minute. I swear if I'm lying, may God strike me dead on this spot. Come here. Come here. You're a lady [inaudible 00:29:11] I didn't like the way she looked at me. She might be a little uncomfortable.

Speaker 11: [29:20](#)

I give you a gift and you leave me, my friends, and my family alone.

Speaker 10: [29:24](#)

Of course. I would never hurt your family, nor you, nor nobody. Lady, I don't even know you.

Speaker 11: [29:30](#) Swear, Louis, and I'll give you your gift.

Speaker 10: [29:34](#) Hey, I'm not interested in your fucking gifts.

Speaker 11: [29:39](#) Oh, yes you are.

Speaker 10: [29:40](#) [inaudible 00:29:40] easy, easy, easy. She's got something you got to hear. That woman, you know the one you've gotten soft over, you think is the love of your life? She wants you dead.

Bill Walton: [29:53](#) Powerful. Good. With a very, very young Alec Baldwin.

Tony LoBianco: [29:59](#) Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I like that movie very much. A good movie. And everybody was great. I mean, Alec was terrific in that movie and so was Jimmy. That movie should have gotten a lot of praise because it's a really good movie. And that's the first time I got introduced to my good friend Jimmy Gandolfini, God rest him.

Bill Walton: [30:19](#) Tony Soprano.

Tony LoBianco: [30:20](#) What a sweet man.

Bill Walton: [30:21](#) Yeah.

Tony LoBianco: [30:21](#) Very good man. So many of our good people are going quick.

Bill Walton: [30:30](#) Yeah, well.

Tony LoBianco: [30:32](#) That was a really good experience for me doing that movie.

Bill Walton: [30:37](#) Well, the thing is, we talk about transformations, my favorite story is Michael Cain, I guess, showed up in Hollywood, very first movie, and he ran into John Wayne at the Polo Lounge at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Wayne came up to him, said, "Nice to meet you." He said, "I got a piece of advice for you." He said, "Michael, if you want to be successful, you got to talk low, talk slow, and don't say much."

Tony LoBianco: [31:12](#) That's funny.

Bill Walton: [31:14](#) Then he said later on when he won the Academy Award-

Tony LoBianco: [31:16](#) When he won he Academy Award. It's funny, he said, "If I had known to wear a patch on my eye would've given me the Academy Award, I would've wore it much sooner." And that, to me... The people who win Academy Awards are people who play other people,. You understand? People who do like Meryl

Streep, Meryl Streep wins Academy Awards because she's playing other humans. And Robert DeNiro wins the Academy Award for playing Jake LaMotta in doing a transformation. All transformation roles, including [inaudible 00:31:55] playing monster, all... That's where you get the Academy Award. That's when people appreciate it. Not when you play straight. When you play straight, very difficult to win an Academy Award, and that's what it meant to me when he put the patch on. To me, he was becoming a character other than John Wayne.

Bill Walton: [32:13](#)

What was your toughest transformation as an actor?

Tony LoBianco: [32:19](#)

I would say when I did that picture I showed before about when I was 21, it was the first time I really went into great depth. I was at the Actors Repertory Theater, and the teacher said to me, "Go in the room and find a character for this role." Because I was 21 years old. And I was at the room, and I looked around, and I picked up a nail that was on the floor. And I went to the radiator, and I scratched it. And I picked up a tone on the thing where I started getting into a kind of physical thing. And it was, "Sure. Sure, I killed him. I'm not saying I didn't. I killed him." That kind of a thing. And also, the idea of changing one's body. You see? Picking out different kinds of...

Tony LoBianco: [33:25](#)

This is what we have to work with. And in order to make these hands older in order to play a thing, your concentration and your imagination has to go very, very strong and believe. And the idea of turning your body into another person's body by molding from within and pushing out or pulling in and making your body and your bones behave a little more different than what you are, and in the body position that you are, will make you more successful. You will then, when you get up to walk on those legs and walk on that position in your body and your spine will be totally different, and that will also change your voice somewhat [crosstalk 00:34:11].

Bill Walton: [34:11](#)

Well, I want everybody here watching this noticing you just age 15, 20, 25 years before our very eyes. Well done.

Tony LoBianco: [34:20](#)

Well, I mean, it's funny, I did that on the [inaudible 00:34:23] PR for Honeymoon Killers, I went on a television show live and I spoke to the interview, and I said, "I can change into an old man right before your eyes." She said, "What?" I said, "Yeah, I'll do it." So, I said to the cameraman, "Here's what you do. I'm going to turn around in my chair, and when I turn back, I want you to come on and keep coming in closer, closer, doing a closeup." And so, I turned around and turned into that guy, and so on and so forth. And she was so stunned, she followed me out of the

studio into the next interview, the interviewer, because it was quite... I really did [crosstalk 00:34:59].

- Bill Walton: [35:01](#) I think of the two, there are many schools of acting, but on the one hand, there's the method school, which is... What is it? Stanislavski, the Russian brought that along. And then later it was Stella Adler and-
- Tony LoBianco: [35:13](#) [inaudible 00:35:13].
- Bill Walton: [35:14](#) Yeah. And where you've tried to do it all internally and you change yourself internally, your perception of who you were, and then that projected as a character. Then on the other side, you've got the British school, which is Lawrence Olivier who said, "All I need to do is put a little putty on my nose," he'd worked with the externals.
- Tony LoBianco: [35:34](#) Sure.
- Bill Walton: [35:34](#) And he'd try to change himself external, and he didn't worry much about becoming Macbeth, he just put on the Macbeth hat.
- Tony LoBianco: [35:40](#) See, that's all part of-
- Bill Walton: [35:42](#) Are those two different things or are they the same thing?
- Tony LoBianco: [35:43](#) Yes. I'll tell you why. At the Dramatic Workshop, my first acting school, I was given a teacher who was a dance choreographer, who knew nothing about the internal. See? All he knew was outside. All he knew was directing and in terms of taking two steps, your timing, and that kind of thing. Now, I was fortunate because, number one, I'm Italian. That's fortunate. Two, I was born in Brooklyn. And three, I had uncles and I had family and loving, passionate family. So, I had all the equipment, being up boxer and a street fighter and all that stuff and all that passion going on in my life that I could do these kinds of things.
- Tony LoBianco: [36:35](#) So, the first thing he put me in, this teacher, was ballet slippers, ballet slippers. Here, this kid comes off from boxing and baseball and physical... He puts me in ballet slippers and tights. That was fine with me. I had no problem with it. No problem, because I believe that you have to transform into other beings to be... So, he taught me but two years, from a directorial standpoint of view, and I was fortunate enough to have all that background to be able to fulfill it emotionally. You see?

- Tony LoBianco: [37:13](#) Then I got to be the guy of the school or the star, all that junk, and then he said, "Okay, now you can go out to work." I said, "Absolutely not. I am not ready." He said, "But you're the best actor in the school. Go work." I said, "No, no. I only learned one way. I have to go to another school and learn the inside out." So, I went to the Actors Repertory Theater and learned. In fact, when I got there, the teacher and I was there for maybe three months, gave me a scholarship, and he said to me, "I want you to teach." I said, "I'm 21 years old. What do you mean teach?" I said, "I can't be teaching. These are young kids who need [inaudible 00:37:57]. He said, "See, I know you know that." So, I taught for a year while I was learning. And it was Joshua Logan, the great Joshua Logan director, who's a teacher, one of the teachers of the school for directing, he's the one who sent me out for my first audition, which I got the part.
- Bill Walton: [38:17](#) What about working with other actors? You've been very successful in theater, you've been very successful in film and TV, but that's a very different medium than the stage. I'm going to lead with my own answer maybe, but in your view, it seems to me when you're on the stage, and I've done just a bit of that, you really get a chance to interact with the other actor, and together you make a performance. And if you get a good bond with somebody, good connection, it transcends even your own performance. Film, you often find yourself, you're looking at a camera and maybe the other actor's standing behind the camera so you can get your closeup, but you're not acting in the same way. What's been your experience with that?
- Tony LoBianco: [39:03](#) Well, it is different. I'm always there for the other actor, and I expect the other actor to always be there for me off camera doing the scene. And prior to that, coming from the stage, I like very much to rehearse, but prior to all that, I always encourage-
- Bill Walton: [39:27](#) Excuse me, you're watching the Bill Walton Show, and we've just been invaded by dogs.
- Tony LoBianco: [39:32](#) So, what's new with that?
- Bill Walton: [39:35](#) We let them wander around the set, and then occasionally they decide that they want to be on camera. Anyway, Tony, I'm sorry to have you upstaged by dogs. We'll get them under control. Anyway, you were being very interesting. Could you just continue with that?
- Tony LoBianco: [39:55](#) I forgot what I was, actually

Bill Walton: [39:57](#) Well, we're talking about stage performances and working with other actors.

Tony LoBianco: [40:01](#) Oh, yes. So, what I generally do is rehearsal with an actor, which reminds me of a story. Richard Widmark, one of my favorite, favorite actors of all time, Kiss of Death, No Way Out. Great. Great. Now, Richard Widmark, it's my first two hour movie. Okay? Auditioning. So, I'm in the room, Larry White was the executive producer, and Richard Widmark is in a chair over here, and I'm over here. And I have three scenes. So, I do the first scene, I do the second scene a little more aggressive, and the third scene, I just explode. And Widmark jumps out of the chair. I took it right to him. And he ducked out of the chair like it was... And of course, I got the part.

Tony LoBianco: [40:51](#) Now, here I am now on the set, and Ronnie Cox, I believe was the co-star in this television series... two hour movie. And he's telling me how Mr. Widmark is a very private person. "When you're ready, you call him, don't call them sooner. You come out and you go to the set, he does the scene, goes right back into his trailer, doesn't communicate with anybody." That's what he's telling me. So, I go knock on his door, the trailer, he opens it up, "What do you want?" I said, "I want to rehearse." "Well, okay. Okay. Come on in. Come on in." So, I come on.

Tony LoBianco: [41:30](#) He sits in one, I sit in the other. We pause, I pause, and I'm thinking, "It's going to be good." He says, "You going to say the first line?" I said, "It's your line." He said, "What script do you have? Let me see that script. They didn't give you the rewrite. Blows his top, jumps out of his... opens the door, "I get over here [inaudible 00:41:52]." I said, "Take it easy. Whoa, whoa." I'm calming him down. He says, "Get him the right script." Gets me the right script. [inaudible 00:41:58] young, I could look at it pretty quickly, and we do the scene. And so on. It goes on.

Tony LoBianco: [42:06](#) Now, later, again, I'm talking to Ronnie Cox and we're outside, and he's telling me, he said... All of a sudden the door opens of the trailer and Widmark comes out, walks right up to the two of us, and he says to Ronnie Cox, "This kid is a great actor." He goes right back into the trailer. I go, "What? What?" Amazing.

Bill Walton: [42:31](#) Fantastic.

Tony LoBianco: [42:32](#) I mean, it's an amazing story. So, that the kinds of things you say, "What?"

Bill Walton: [42:41](#) Well, there's a reason why you were in over 100 movies.

Tony LoBianco: [42:44](#) That's true. But even though I sound, and I like to be involved with everything, again, the most important thing is I'm only here to help, and if I say something that you don't know... You're the Director. You're the director. You're the boss. And if I do say something that is not helpful or better for what we're going to do, don't take it. I'm the same way when I'm directing. I have no ego. I want the best for everything. And I think of everything. As an actor, as a director, when I read a script, I see everything. So, forgive me, what can I tell you? And if it doesn't work out, in your mind, then okay, we move on.

Bill Walton: [43:37](#) We've got to wrap up, but for somebody who wants to be an actor or for people to understand an actor, what would be your advice?

Tony LoBianco: [43:49](#) Talk low...

Bill Walton: [43:53](#) Well, it got him an Academy Award with that patch.

Tony LoBianco: [43:53](#) Exactly. Exactly.

Bill Walton: [43:58](#) By the way, I don't think Michael Caine followed that advice.

Tony LoBianco: [44:00](#) No, no, no, no. Not at all. I tell you, it's so difficult. Let's start with that. It is impossible and most difficult, you have to have a powerful, powerful desire and will to pursue in this Business. Because what you're going to get is rejection, That'll be 90% of the time. And you have to know and believe in yourself and know that whoever rejects you doesn't know what the hell they're doing. And because they don't see... And listen, also, you have to be realistic. Jake LaMotta, the middleweight champ, the Raging Bull, he was a friend of mine, and he gave me the book and he said, "If Robert DeNiro doesn't do this part, you're going to do it." The Raging Bull. Okay?

Bill Walton: [45:05](#) You would have been great.

Tony LoBianco: [45:06](#) But he was-

Bill Walton: [45:06](#) You would have been fantastic.

Tony LoBianco: [45:07](#) But my point is, he was great, and I think he did a better job than I would do. So, that's what I am for, the best job that can possibly be done. And so, that's why I bring other actors to do that role, to see if he's the right actor. When I was directing, I wanted to see... My first directing thing on television with Jackie

Cooper. See? And when I was casting, I said to the casting person, "I cast the extras."

- Bill Walton: [45:43](#) Were you directing, or was Jackie directing?
- Tony LoBianco: [45:43](#) I was directing.
- Bill Walton: [45:43](#) Okay. You were directing okay.
- Tony LoBianco: [45:47](#) I was directing Jackie Cooper. I said, "I cast the extras." She said, "Nobody casts the extras." I said, "I cast the extras." I said, "Have them come in." She said, "Well, I've got to go to a theater." I said, "Good. You go to the theater and just bring the people in." So, I had this one actor, and extra and I was talking to him about [inaudible 00:46:05] and I wind up giving him a part, a real good part in this television show. Because I drew out of him something great. And the reviews, the reviews talked about the faces in the crowd. Can you imagine that? I mean, that is fantastic. It's the same thing when I did A View from the Bridge, there's a man waiting outside with his wife, and he said to me he was shaking. And he said, "How do you know? How do you know?"
- Bill Walton: [46:38](#) [inaudible 00:46:38].
- Tony LoBianco: [46:41](#) I mean, that's success.
- Bill Walton: [46:46](#) I think we have a wrap.
- Tony LoBianco: [46:49](#) I want to do a movie with you.
- Bill Walton: [46:50](#) We can end on that. We've had fun.
- Tony LoBianco: [46:51](#) I want to do a movie with you.
- Bill Walton: [46:53](#) Let's do a movie.
- Tony LoBianco: [46:54](#) I think you're a great actor.
- Bill Walton: [46:54](#) Yeah. So, it'd be fun. We would have a good time.
- Tony LoBianco: [46:57](#) Yeah.
- Bill Walton: [46:58](#) Yeah. We'll get a... So, Kenny, let's work on a script here. You've got a book you're writing. We can [crosstalk 00:47:06].
- Tony LoBianco: [47:05](#) I would love that. Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Bill Walton: [47:07](#) Well, this is such fun. Such fun. Tony LoBianco, fabulous actor, fabulous person, insightful, generous, interesting. I'm thrilled to have you here finally.

Tony LoBianco: [47:19](#) Is that all? You have nothing more to say than [crosstalk 00:47:21]?

Bill Walton: [47:20](#) I've got more but... Anyway, great fun. Okay. Well, you've been watching the Bill Walton show, and thanks for joining and we'll see you next time.

Bill Walton: [47:31](#) I hope you enjoyed the conversation. Want more? Click the subscribe button, or head over to thebillwaltonshow.com, to choose from over 100 episodes. You can also learn more about our guests on our Interesting People page. And send us your comments. We read every one, and your thoughts help us guide the show. If it's easier for you to listen, check out our podcast page and subscribe there. In return, we'll keep you informed about what's true, what's right, and what's next. Thanks for joining.