

“As Spiders Do” – UR Alumni Podcast

Episode 2

Live from LA w/ Jamie McShane, R’88 & Marc Provissiero R’89

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[intro music plays]

Maggie Johnson:

Welcome to As Spiders Do, the University of Richmond podcast where we share stories about our amazing alumni. I’m your host, Maggie Johnson from the Class of 2018. Today we’re bringing you part two from our live interview with *Wednesday* actor Jamie McShane and Emmy-nominated producer and manager Marc Provissiero, where they answer the audience’s questions. Thanks for tuning in and now, on to the show.

[intro music fades out]

Jazzmin Reid:

Hi everyone, my name is Jazzmin Reid. I’m class of 2016, so a lot later than you guys.

[laughter]

Jamie McShane:

And she’s done.

Jazzmin Reid:

But I think my main question is what was the moment where you guys felt like you really broke into the industry? Like whether it be with writing and producing or acting, what was the moment where you felt like this was my step that got me there?

Jamie McShane:

My first big guest star break was on *NYPD Blue*. It was a big show back in the day, New York Cops, and I played a New York detective. And the creator of that show, Steven Bochco, was one of the big, big names in TV. And I wound up working for him quite a bit, and he was very, very good to me. But I would say that getting, you know, I auditioned for it and then I booked it. It was a big deal for me at the time, yeah.

Marc Provissiero:

I mean, there are a few steps along the way, but I’ll pick. When I got that job at a TV literary agency, that first day when I started there, I realized, this might actually work. I was, as an assistant.

Jazzmin Reid:

And for you, what led you more towards managing and producing versus directing?

Marc Provissiero:

Um, well, I never thought about being a director.

Jamie McShane:

Have you now?

Marc Provissiero:

No, no, I thought, okay, so I’ll share this. When I was 28 or 29 years old, I had been through a few professions. Again, as I mentioned, I, I always did well, excelled in sales and I was not happy with my career. And I took a couple classes, like a weekend seminar, trying to figure out, it was one of those seminars that helped you figure out what you wanted to be when you grew up. And I came out of it with a list of the top five things. And it was, number one was, do you know this? ... Actor

Jamie McShane:

Really?

Marc Provissiero:

Yeah.

Jamie McShane:

You missed your calling, kid.

Marc Provissiero:

I know, I don’t know. Number two was a film producer. Number three was, I think, copywriter for advertising. Number four was manager. Maybe manager and copyright, I don’t remember. Manager and then agent. And I said, well, I’m 28 or 29. Someone had told me you need to give yourself 17 years to be successful as an actor if you’re going to take it on as a profession, rather than as a fad. And I was starting way too late, so I crossed that off. And then I said, okay, and the film producer, I’m like, I didn’t understand the route to become successful. It wasn’t clear to me how, there was no clear track to go up to become a film producer. And again, I was old, and I was told I was too old to start in the business, actually, at 28 or 29, and without any start. And then manager/agent, that’s the one that I connected

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to and I said, oh, I understand. That’s, again, I can use my sales skills and that’s where I excel. And one of the principles in that course was lead with your strength and that was a strength. And I just thought I would break through and then I’d figure it out from there and I broke through as an agent and then, you know, segue once I had enough experience into managing/producing.

Jazzmin Reid:

I have one last question for you guys. What fraternity were you guys in? Or are you guys in?

Jamie McShane:

PiKa, Pi Kappa Alpha.

Jazzmin Reid:

I knew it. They threw some of the best parties. You guys both hit me like one of those, I knew it.

Marc Provissiero:

Thank you.

Jamie McShane:

But you were like 40 years later.

Jazzmin Reid:

Yeah, but the spirit’s still there.

Marc Provissiero:

Thank you.

Jamie McShane:

Thank you.

Todd Flora:

Terrific tonight. How are we gonna avoid these strikes? Writers, I think directors, that was another possibility. That’s, I know, on a lot of people’s minds here in town.

[whistles]



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Jamie McShane:

You want to do that?

Marc Provissiero:

I don't know that we are. I think that, you know, there was one good sign in that normally the DGA makes a deal before the WGA and I think they just recently announced that they're going to wait and sit behind the WGA. Normally when the DGA out of nowhere goes and makes a deal four weeks before the impending WGA strike, it takes a significant amount of wind out of their sail. The WGA loses some of their leverage every time. The DGA has done that many times. For some reason this time the DGA is not doing that. And I think it's because everyone has a residuals issue with the streamers, including the DGA. You know, it's the WGA saying please don't talk about, refer to it, I just heard this today as the strike, because there is no strike right now. It's a negotiation. And it would be awful. It would be really, really awful. This is not a great time for this to happen. And unfortunately, the issues are real on both sides. The writers have lost money relative to the other professions, including actors, over the past 10 years. And, and they're barely able to make a living and afford living in Los Angeles. And on the other side, we all hear all day long that the streamers are actually losing money. So, they're not, they're cutting jobs and cutting spending rather than spending more money. So, it's a horrible situation and moment in time for both sides. And you just hope that smarter minds prevail and everyone realizes that it would not be great, it certainly wouldn't be great for writers for this to happen at this time. And writers are very aware of it. And even though the streamers say, we'll just use international programming, in reality, programming to fill our slates right now. I can't imagine that they actually would rather do that. That's just their strategy if it happens. And so hopefully, you know everyone comes to the table with an intention to actually negotiate.

Jamie McShane:

Kind of on that note, it's so difficult as an actor now because so much is out of town. I mean, I shot *Wednesday* in Bucharest, Romania. I mean, I was there for seven months. I got two of my own kids, two of her kids, and it was a long haul. And at the end of it, the big tax break they were supposed to give us the tax incentive, they just bailed.

Marc Provissiero:

No...

Jamie McShane:

Yeah, Romania just bailed. It was like 30 million or whatever. They’re like, yeah, no, we’re not going to pay that. You know, it’s rough and I think we’re gonna do season two, possibly in Ireland or London, which is lovely, but it’s just, I’d like to do something at Warner Brothers and ride my bike to work, you know?

Seth Lewandowski:

Hey, I’m Seth Lewandowski, graduated in ‘04. Jamie and I..I was actually in a movie, not with Jamie, we didn’t have any scenes together. That movie, *The Meanest Man in Texas*.

Jamie McShane:

Oh, you were in that too?

Seth Lewandowski:

Yeah.

Jamie McShane:

You look familiar.

Seth Lewandowski:

We did that, yeah. There’s a lot of people in this movie. And we did that Q&A at that theater. In Glendale. You’ve probably done a million of them.

Jamie McShane:

No, I haven’t.

Seth Lewandowski:

It’s hard to remember.

Jamie McShane:

I’ve hardly really been invited. In Glendale, right?

Seth Lewandowski:

Yeah, was it in Glendale? I honestly can’t even remember. Anyway, we met afterwards. We talked for like a second, but this was a number of years ago. And I’m still an actor. My question is, and hmm. It is, I don’t want to get too personal here, so feel free to say I don’t

want to answer that. But it’s about sort of, people talk a lot about mental health and talked about the struggle and the rejection and I’m curious if either or both of you have had any mental health struggles, you know, dealing with the rejection in the industry and, or just in general at all in the industry that you want to talk about at all in any way, shape or form? But you don’t have to.

Jamie McShane:

Yeah, I mean, yes. I mean ... Jesus, where do I start with that one? I’ve alluded to when I was a kid, something happened, and I didn’t follow my dream. To sum it up, I slipped on sawdust in school. I smacked my head. My skull cracked and cut the artery. And I wasn’t supposed to make it. I got a scar here, a hole in my head. And um, I made it through it, which I wasn’t expected to, and then that’s when I kind of just gave up on everything, and then the guy in Australia was like, “why not?” So, I do, I struggle, like we said, I struggle with rejection, I struggle with the fear of not being able to provide for my family. I struggle with it a lot, and I don’t know...you know, like my girlfriend’s like, “I think some of its PTSD from when you smacked your head, you know, a million years ago,” and or it’s this and that. And so, yeah, it’s a, it’s a constant battle. And that’s where it’s, it’s interesting, because for me as an actor, and I think I blow things out of proportion, Like I absorb too much and I don’t let it go as much. Even in college, like people used to just, sorry, stuff didn’t bother them. And it would sit with me, it would just sink in. And as I became an actor, I found an outlet for that stuff. And it’s helped my career immensely. Me as an individual getting through the day, not so good. So, I struggle with it. I refuse to take any medications or anything because I’m afraid it would tarnish whatever it helps. You know, it helps me as an actor, but yeah, all the time.

Seth Lewandowski:

Thank you.

Marc Provissiero:

My wife is sitting right there. I feel like she’s got ideas. But I’m so curious. Whatever I say, I’m gonna hear some notes on it when I leave here. I don’t, ah, I’m sure I go through bouts of depression. I know I do sometimes when I don’t want exercise. I mean, exercise has probably been the number one thing for me. I would say...two things. I have found that my personal observation is from my body. If I go three days without exercising, it’s not good. So, I have, I have, it’s, it is sacrosanct. If I spend two days and I haven’t exercised, I’m exercising the next day. For me, I enjoy doing things rather than being in the gym - tennis, or surf, whatever it is outside or something active or sport related, so my brain is activated. That’s really crucial.



And work within the workspace, what has led me to go through the path of obviously the challenge of this profession. I don’t know how to plot, you’re an actor, correct?

Seth Lewandowski:

Yeah.

Marc Provissiero:

I don’t know how this applies, but I’ll tell you. I remember when I, my first year as an agent, I said to my boss, how much servicing should I do of the, of the comp-, of the company’s list, whether I like the client or not, or is drawn to them creatively or not. And thank God he said zero. None. He said, your first year that it would be successful if you find one great person you’re excited about and you get them staffed on one terrific show. That’s it. And so that’s been my prism ever since. So, I find that people get burned out or their mental health is stressed more when they’re doing things that, the more they’re doing things they don’t wanna do.

Seth Lewandowski:

Right.

Marc Provissiero:

And I was given the license from the very beginning to build something as a representative. Your business is your list of clients. I was given the license to build people I was only thrilled about. I was true to that almost all the time, not all the time. I’ve certainly made, you know, choices that I realized I shouldn’t have made. But by and large, definitely by and large, 80, 90% of the time, I only pursued people that I was excited about, genuinely. And that, I think that that has been its own pharmaceutical for me.

Seth Lewandowski:

Thank you very much, guys.

Marc Provissiero:

Thank you.

Seth Lewandowski:

Thank you. Really appreciate that.

Jamie McShane:

Yeah. Yeah. Painful.

Andrew McReynolds:

Andrew McReynolds, 2005. I actually just had a question, sort of an odd one, relating to artificial intelligence, as it relates to like, ChatGPT and script generation. So, you know, in theory, it's obviously just, you know, come out recently, but I don't know if, the question is if the industry is doing anything to, you know, help protect artists, or they're having any conversations around it, you know, umm, you know because presently you could basically into the computer and say, hey, I want a 30-minute script in the voice of Shonda Rhimes on a candy store or whatever, and it'll knock it out in a second. Then obviously you don't have somebody to pay who's a writer and an artist on that end. But yeah, so I was just wondering, is there anything that's being discussed around that? And have you noticed anything that's been popping up, i.e. ChatGPT scripts that people are sending in?

Marc Provissiero:

The mental illness question should have come after this one. *[laughter]* We have been talking about it, and it's so new. You know, ChatGPT, right, just arrived a few weeks ago, as far as I'm aware. And one of the leading ... one of the leaders in the entire industry, this lawyer named Ken Ziffren, just wrote a white paper on it that I have saved that I haven't read yet that I'm going to read this weekend and I'd be more informed to answer the question. Right now, the rhetoric is, the conversation is, you know, AI can write a script but it doesn't have a soul to it. You know, maybe that's true right now but this is first generation. So, I have no idea. I have no idea. You know, I heard someone say writers won't write structure necessarily, but they'll become less writers and more editors moving forward. I've heard that. I don't know what that means. I don't know what that looks like. I have no idea what the parameters are in terms of creative controls or protections. It's a great question that we're going to be figuring out over the next year or two.

Grace Brady:

Thank you. Hi, I'm Grace Brady, class of '88. I don't know if you remember me, but nice to see you. Mine's a silly question, but first I just wanted to thank you both for your time and your humility. I'm new to LA, moved to be closer to family, and you have this image of LA as Hollywood, and Jamie, your comment about being appreciative and making a living, I think is very important, and I appreciated that.

Jamie McShane:

Thank you.

Grace Brady:

And both of your comments. So, my only question really is a silly one, but would you want your children to follow the careers that you followed?

Jamie McShane:

If that’s what they want to do, yeah. I wouldn’t recommend it. My son Luke has always been a stage performer. He sings and, you know, he’s always wanted to do something. You know, he’s actually a really good lyricist. I wouldn’t want to direct him into it, but if that’s what he wants to do, awesome. Liam, my younger one, really, he’s interested very much in the film business. He’s not sure what he wants to do, but he loves the idea of writing adult, what do you call, animated comedy like Paradise PD? So, Marc produces some of these shows that are just hysterical. And they’re, it’s like, you know, Hanna-Barbera looking cartoons, but they’re raunchy and they’re hysterical. And my son Liam is really drawn to that. He’s very smart. So, I mean, it’s a great industry. Are you in the industry?

Grace Brady:

No, no.

Jamie McShane:

It’s such a wonderful industry to be in. It’s, for me, it’s like a team sport. You get on set. This is your job, this is your job, we’re all trying to get the same thing, you know, set up the shot, you know, come in, do it. And it’s just, I love the collaborative aspect. And I love that we create something artistic, you know, you with the lighting, you with this, da-duh, da-duh, da-duh, and we make this package. Like, I just, I love it. So, I love the industry. So there, you know?

Grace Brady:

I mean, I am in the arts, and I do love the collaborative aspect of it.

Jamie McShane:

What did you do in the arts?

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Grace Brady:

I worked in the art museum world for most of my career. But in college, the irony is I was a theater major, but behind the scenes I was the one who did the laundry in the costume department. I acted in one play and you quickly know whether it’s for you or not. So yeah, I really love the arts and just love hearing people who are very appreciative to being in the arts, like the both of you. So, yeah. Thank you both.

Jamie McShane:

Thank you. You too.

Maura Soden:

I’m Maura Soden, I was there when, just, they changed after the name Boatwright University. That’s how far back I go.

Marc Provissiero:

All right.

Maura Soden:

Seriously, I think I’m the oldest one, ‘78. Anyway, Marc, this is particularly geared for you, I think. A few years ago, packaging technically stopped?

Marc Provissiero:

Oh my gosh.

Maura Soden:

Is that true?

Marc Provissiero:

You guys are coming after me tonight.

Maura Soden:

We are, Marc. Well, you did mention you have clients and you look for appropriate material for them, and that’s normal. So, people are still sending you scripts knowing your client list, correct?

Marc Provissiero:

Correct.

Maura Soden:

Okay.

Jamie McShane:

Will you just briefly explain packaging, like in a nutshell?

Marc Provissiero:

So, yeah, so Maura, you’re asking about like, what are you asking about packaging?

Maura Soden:

I just wondered if it does seem like it would still have to go on, but you’re not maybe funding shows, or scripts for your clients?

Marc Provissiero:

So, you’re saying when they announced this as of a couple years ago, there’s no more packaging, are we still actually putting the elements together? That’s the question?

Maura Soden:

Yes.

Marc Provissiero:

So, the packaging, I want to try and answer this so it’s not boring to people who don’t care about this part of it, but it’s a really great question. Agencies took a packaging fee, and that’s what they went after. Not anyone else. So, and I’m not an agent, but the agencies were no longer actually, most of the time, actually putting the show together with the writer and the actor. And they were just taking a huge fee out of the license fee just because they represented a really important client, but doing nothing to actually put the show together. So that has gone away. And you’re asking, are people still putting the elements together? And I would argue, umm, if anything, more so. Because now instead of receiving a passive fee for just representing one person and not having to be motivated to do anything else, now you need to supplant that income that you’ve lost, you need more elements, more people involved with the project to commission each and every one of them. So, there’s actually, I think, more motivation for agencies to actually package, which is interesting.

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Jamie McShane:

What are you trying to package?

Maura Soden:

[laughter] Did I mention? I’ll go now. Thank you very much.

Jamie McShane:

Thank you.

[outro music plays]

Maggie Johnson:

Thanks for listening to As Spiders Do from the University of Richmond Office of Alumni Relations. We hope you enjoyed hearing from today’s alumni guests and learned a little bit more about what it means to be a Richmond Spider. Thank you to Olivia Huber, Class of 2025, for editing this episode. Our episode music is by [FAS Sounds](#) from [Pixabay](#). You can subscribe to As Spiders Do wherever you get your podcasts, and leave us a review to let us know what you think. We’re always looking for new stories to share, so let us know who else we should feature by emailing us at alumni@richmond.edu. That’s all for this episode. Talk to you soon, and remember, there are Spiders everywhere, and that’s a really good thing.

[music fades]