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[00:01:01] <intro music>

Intro: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm really happy to be here with you today. We have got a super fun show in store for you. Today on the show I get to talk to Aaron Benward and Luke Benward. You may notice that they share a last name. That's because they are an eminently talented father and son duo.

Aaron is the producer and Luke is one of the stars of the new movie, *Playing God*, from Watershed Motion Pictures. I got to see the movie and I found it to be so funny and interesting and really fascinating about a brother and sister con artist who take on a creative opportunity to swindle someone out of a lot of money with the promise that he's going to get to meet God face to face. Without giving anything away, I'll just say that they learn a lot about grief and redemption and good and evil in some pretty fascinating ways.

You may recognize Aaron, he has been in the Christian music world for a long time, and Luke is all over your TV and all over movies that you love. And so this is a really fun conversation with this father and son from the movie *Playing God*. Here's Aaron and Luke Benward.

Annie: I haven't gotten to do a father-son interview, so this is a real moment for me. Have y'all done a lot of these with *Playing God*?

Aaron: No, you're our first too.

Annie: Get out of here.

Luke: He interviewed me for the behind-the-scenes.

Aaron: It was really weird to interview your son, act like you don't know the answers to a lot of these questions.

Annie: Right. Right. The fun part for me and our friends, listen, is we're going to get to experience y'all's relationship right here in front of us based on who answers and how they answer and...

Aaron: The behind the scene is like, "Hey, Luke, I hear your father is your biggest influence in your life."

Annie: What are the top three things you love about your dad? That's your first thing.

Aaron: Exactly. Exactly.

Annie: Listen, for starters, I want to tell you I loved *Playing God*. That is a great movie.

Aaron: Thank you.

Luke: Thank you.

Annie: Really well done. Aaron, will you back us up? Because I think you're the producer, Aaron. So what made you decide to jump on and be a part of this movie when you heard it or read it or found out about it.

Aaron: Yeah, well, actually it was just a simple concept the writer/ director had. The idea of somebody *Playing God* was one I was like, "Okay, take me through that. How's that going to play out?" And then the concept of it being couched in a con film, I'm a big con film guy anyway, I was like, "Okay, now I'm really doubly intrigued."

And then as we kind of begin to break the story, myself, Scott Brignac, the writer/director, and my two partners Cody Bess and Cliff Young, we began to

realize that, wow, we might have something pretty unique here. You know, you kind of always try to go into something, telling a story in a way that maybe that's never been told before. Of course, there have been movies where people have played God, so to speak, but how could we do it in a way and what kind of topics would we want to cover from the standpoint of "Why? Why this movie, why this story?"

And as we kind of began to unfold and develop it, we realized this could be a really fun journey and one that actually has obviously heart moments as well as we see in the journey of Rachel the lead character. Man, it was one that...

Then we started getting it out to talent, you know, beyond obviously, my son, people like Michael McKean, Alan Tudyk, and others that we cast and their response to the content began to really kind of solidify and confirm that we do have something to say here. Because to get really A-level talent like we were able to get, in my opinion, the content has to speak for itself, the script has to be something that guys want to be a part of. And it came back with glaring colors that they wanted to. So we were excited to get on that journey.

Annie: Okay. Luke, you star in the film. Will you kind of start by giving us... give us just like the synopsis. For people who haven't seen the trailer yet, what is this movie?

Luke: Well, it's about a brother-sister con artists duo who are trying to make a living doing what they do and one day they become apprehended by this crime boss who, Micah, my character, owes money to. And he basically-

Annie: A lot of money by the way. Not like casual money.

Luke: A lot of money.

Annie: You have really done a thing in this story.

Luke: Yeah. And so he basically gives an ultimatum, "Give me the money or die." So the stakes are immediately upped and they have to kind of figure out how they're going to pay back this large sum of money. They come across a contract to point to this eccentric billionaire who lost his family and he's on this journey really across the world.

He's talking to shamans, he's traveling all across trying to find God. He's trying to find God to ask Him why He killed his family and if He is this Almighty, why He would allow for such a tragedy to happen. Which I think, from just a human

perspective, is such an endea... not endearing but the drawing emotion. I think that people feel that a lot when tragedy strikes.

Annie: So common. Yeah.

Luke: 100%. So basically they take it upon themselves that they're going to give this guy what he wants. They're going to give him the connection to God. And so they bring in their mentor—Michael McKean plays this character. And basically they convince this billionaire that Michael McKean is God and that he will give him the answers. So that's basically where the con starts.

Annie: It is an unbelievable movie because y'all do such a cool job, Luke, of mixing... the con artist part is very fun. It's very good. But there's also this major grieving underlying that all of us can relate to on some degree, though maybe not to that level of that grief. And then there's the God part. Why was this movie a yes for you? Of all the things you do, all the things we know you for, why was this a yes?

Luke: Obviously I was excited to work with my pops. He had been wanting to produce for a while and obviously during that I was constantly like, "Let me know." I always wanted to work with my dad. But from a story standpoint, I think it was a very layered script. It was very honest. I really enjoyed the story. I enjoyed the idea that con artists are *Playing God* in their everyday life but also in this story, they are literally *Playing God*. Even just down from the title of the script, I thought it was very, very clever.

And then from a character's perspective, I want to have a body of work that is diversified and I want to look back on it at the end of my life and just feel pride in the sense that I pushed myself and that I didn't just stay in my lane. That I branched out and I took chances and I stretched myself. This was an opportunity where I... obviously I played a con artist. I don't really get to play the bad guy a ton and the antagonist. So I wanted to do that.

I saw Micah is this really complex character with a lot of layers and a lot of actor term, inner monologue and inner dialogue, and a lot going on in his head. He doesn't say but that is important to see brewing below the surface. And I was just intrigued by him. So I got done. I saw a lot of potential and I was excited to step into his shoes and kind of see what game.

Annie: I won't ruin it but the very last scene where you see your character is so like, "Oh, no." Like you just kind of want to be like... you feel the tension of who he could be versus who he is. And you're like, "Oh, gosh, guy, come on." It's awesome.

Luke: It's cool. It's one of those scenes where you kind of get to see him I think feel that same emotion.

Annie: Yeah, yeah.

Luke: I think that it's cool. It's that choice of like, "So I want to be who I should be or am I okay being who I am. I think that at the end of the day he is a survivor. I think that people are who they are. It's the way he grew up, it's all he knows. I think that the fear of that unknown was just too much and he's staying in his lane.

Annie: Yeah, that's it. My dream is that somewhere in the world there's *Playing God* Part 2 and... it's his redemption story in *Playing Part 2*.

Luke: Hey, maybe it's time.

Annie: Let's write it. Let's go. Aaron, people probably know you're kind of a Christian music legend. Like you've kind of been in our world in the Christian music world for forever. I would love to know, what do you think about God differently after making this movie than you did before?

Aaron: Oftentimes I call myself a career Christian because I found Jesus, got saved, all the different lingos we use when I was young guy, five or six years old. Then went into ministry. My dad was in ministry and then all the knowledge, if you will, chapter and verse. I guess I had theology like the forearms of pie pie. You know what I mean? Just tons. Went to Christian school, the whole deal, raised my children to love God, you know, love my wife.

But I think it's about an experience, man, that I'm learning. Like so what you have we can speak about it? So what theologically we can break it down and/or ad nauseam I think at times, we can just discuss stuff? Rather than what changed for me was the experience over the last couple of years of just this true surrender of... for me and my life personally, I just turned 48. I was like, "I got kind of sick of getting what I'm getting." And what that was just kind of like a not the peace that He affords us and said that He gives us, you know, I honestly didn't have. He just said, "Well, then give up." That's kind of like what I felt like in my heart and my mind and all of that together.

Similarly, in *Playing God*, it's like, "Alan Tudyk, the character Ben, who has gone through crazy tragedy, gone through that crazy loss in his life, is he playing along

with the fact that this guy is really God? Or does he really believe this guy is really got in the flesh? That's up to the viewer.

Because when we go through difficult and painful things, oftentimes we cope in ways that maybe some people think is stupid or maybe some people think is outlandish, or whatever. But pain is real and pain is difficult. But when we experience God in the way our character Ben in this story does, ultimately it creates reconnection with someone... I don't want to give the movie away. I almost did. ...reconnection with someone that that wouldn't have seen coming if he hadn't experienced God in the way he did.

And so for me, my life and my personal life, my relationships, my dreams, my career, my art, my marriage, they've all just really have gone to a level of that I always got a fulfillment of peace because of this allowing myself, allowing my heart to not to get on my head, and allow my heart to experience the relationship.

For me, it's not just ethereal out there, outlandish kind of far-fetched deal. It's my point of contact. As someone who follows Christ, my point of contact is a person. When I walked down to the person of Jesus, His example, His life, what He said, what He said He would give, He did what He said He would do and the only person who do it by conquering death, I'm just like, "Man, that's my point of contact." Anyway, that's maybe a long-winded answer to a short question, but that's what it was.

Annie: That's beautiful. Luke, in the movie, the guy who's grieving, I mean that the con you're pulling on him as he's looking everywhere for God, because he's grieving the loss of a child, and y'all convince him that you found God and that He can talk to God. When I was watching it, this is the thing that I was like, "Man, I hope I get to talk to Luke." Because when you're sitting there and you're watching those scenes where that grieving father is having these conversations with God, what were you experiencing as a person watching that?

Luke: I mean, honestly, as a person watching Alan work, I was really impressed. He is... there is a term. The actor's actor. And it's kind of like it's a loose term but he really is the actor's actor. And what I mean by that is he operates from a work ethic and passion and so every time he steps up to the plate, whether he's off-camera and it's someone else's turn, he's constantly just swinging for the fences. It was incredible to watch.

So to watch his range of emotions in that character was pretty astounding. But I guess going into it, it's one of those characters where it does take that level of

nuance and talent quite frankly to pull it off. Obviously you have this grieving aspect so there is some suspended belief there. But it is kind of a far-fetched idea to accept that someone is convinced that they're speaking to God when it's Michael McKean.

Annie: Right.

Luke: I was reading the script, I was like, "Look you're going to get someone who's really good."

Annie: Believable.

Luke: Like, "He's got to show up and really pull this off because this is a hard swing." And he did. That's what I think personally I was obviously pleased but so just enamored with was his ability to connect with this character and bridge that gap to make it to where you're like... Especially the scene where—and I don't want to give too much away—but where he basically use his hand as the medium to talk to his daughter. Watching that scene and watching Alan's range of emotions through that scene over and over and over and over and over again was incredible.

Annie: Aaron, were you on set a lot of days. Did you see a lot of this too?

Aaron: Every single frame of this movie, absolutely.

Annie: Did you?

Aaron: Yeah. This was my first movie to produce. And so it was, one, a learning experience, and two, incredible experience. Through Luke's career, my wife, his mom was on set with him every time. But when I would come off tour, come off the road, I would oftentimes go to where they were, whether it was Austin or Spokane or LA or whatever. And so I had a lot of experience on set. But for me as a producer, this was my first movie to produce. And so it's a lot easier just to show up on set and hang out there and do some movie.

Annie: Fair. I would imagine. Again, never been on a call sheet but I've heard that it will be easier to watch your son act than to produce the entire movie probably.

Aaron: Yeah.

Annie: I mean, Luke, when you think about your roles, so many of our friends know you from all the things you've done, including Because of Winn-Dixie, all the places

where we know you from, where you're the nice guy even though you're not really a nice guy.

Luke: Actually Because of Winn-Dixie, I was a bully in that too.

Annie: That's true.

Aaron: A nine-year-old bully.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. That's right.

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about another one of our incredible partners, [Moinkbox.com](https://moinkbox.com). I think this is absolutely wild. Why do four companies control 80% of the US meat industry? Because big food crushes the little guy. But y'all we can help change that with Moinkbox.com.

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And now back to our conversation with Aaron and Luke.

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Annie: Where does this role fit in all of that to you? Like when you look at your career so far, which there's so much more to come, which is exciting, but when you look at your career so far, where does this *Playing God* role fit for you? How did it grow you and change you?

Luke: You know, I think that it's a part of a natural growth. And it was one where, like I said, I was able to kind of break that mold. It was a muscle that I had been really yearning to exercise for a while, which was that other side of the coin, right that like, you know, I'm always interested in the black sheep. I think we all are. We're always interested in the one on the fringes of society, the one with the rough edges, the one with the walls up. So I was really yearning to stretch that muscle and this gave me the opportunity to do that.

I had worked with Scott and Cody prior. I mean, my dad went to Second Baptist out in Houston, where they're on staff and we did church production there. So I had met them. So I was coming into a situation where I was very comfortable and where there was just kind of trust there throughout the whole team.

So I stepped in the character, I really felt ownership in the choices, I felt like I could get on set make the decisions that were impacting me emotionally, which I think ultimately affects the outcome of the character. So I think that was huge for me, because so often you just go on set, you do your job, and you go home. This was one of really the first ones where I felt like I could go on set and really give from myself and be vulnerable, truthfully vulnerable.

So I think that was, looking back on it, kind of one of the biggest growth for me was realizing that performances really have to come from an honest place. And if it's not affecting me, if I'm not feeling these emotions, then it's not going to translate to the audience as well. So I think that was probably the most eye-opening thing for me on this.

Annie: I think one of the things we saw last weekend with the Emmys, with *Ted Lasso* winning so much, is that people are really into... Well, it is not like G rated by any stretch, people are really into feel-good entertainment right now.

So I would love for y'all to have this conversation with us about Christian movies. Because there is this line of really cheesy, bad Christian movies. Like we're kind of not known for making good movies that are faith-centric. But everybody wants

things that feel good like Ted Lasso. And y'all did that with *Playing God*. What is the world of Christian movies and faith-based movies? And how do we keep making them good? And why are they sometimes terrible?

Aaron: I'll start, Luke, because I am going to start with a statement that may turn people off.

Annie: Oh, good.

Aaron: I hate Christian movies. I really do. I love Christian people but I hate Christian movies. Here's what I hate about them. Not the fact that people are set out to make certain types of content, but that we have to put a label Christian in front of it. And it bothers me. And here's why.

You know, *Playing God* and Watershed Motion Pictures, my production company with my partners, we've set out to create content that is one, first and foremost, great art, the best that we can, at least in the limitations that we have and things like that. But my partners and I have faith.

So if we're going to create art from our life and who we are, then what's going to come through our stories of love and redemption on the stories that are of faith. But to call ourselves faith-based filmmakers makes me want to throw up. Because I don't compete with faith-based filmmakers if they call themselves that. I compete with Steven Spielberg and J.J. Abrams. When I say compete, I mean I want the best for them. I think they're some of the best filmmakers in the world, meaning I want to make those types of stories and content.

And *Playing God*, to be quite frankly, we didn't market it at all as a faith-based movie. We just marked it as a conduit. You go look anywhere on Amazon or Apple or anywhere you watch your movies, it's going to come up comedy/drama. It's not going to come up faith because we did a lot of testing on purpose with his movie previous to getting it to where we got it with probably five different tests with multi-generational audiences, multicultural audiences, audiences with different lenses of faith, or no faith, on purpose. And 10 out of 10 times, I'm not exaggerating, people that were either agnostic or atheistic in their belief loved the con, loved the journey. They felt the heart at the end of it and had no feeling of being preached to or talked to, or trying to be coaxed into something.

And people who had a lens of faith say, "Oh, man, I saw this in cool way you nuanced when you talk about grief, and dah, dah, and perspective." Quite frankly, that's what we want to do, man. It's like we at Watershed feel like we're pioneering

a new road. *Playing God* was the very first movie. It was hard, honestly, when we got to the distribution and marketing side of movie, because so often these companies, whether it's faith-based companies or not, are going, "Who are we selling this to?" And they're like, "This is not a faith people, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and this is not all the way *Ocean's Eleven* type of movie. This is somewhere in between."

And I said, "Exactly." And we set out to do that along with our investor who invested in this movie, to do something very, very specific so that everyone can come to this table and hopefully see a good movie and get something out of it for whatever they got out of it. I'm not here to give anybody answers. I'm not here to say, "This is it?" Because quite frankly, the core of all of us, we don't know. We believe, in faith, certain things. But we don't know because we can't see it. So when they see the movie, hopefully they get something out of it.

And so as we continue on, and we already have more movies getting ready to come out next year and things like that, we are set out to do things that just create dialogue and create discussion. I hope people when they see the movie go, "Whoa." And they start looking back through it and if they really think about it, they can start seeing little nuggets and little pieces of kind of morsels we dropped along the way that when we get to the end of the movie, that they'll be like, "Oh my gosh, I didn't realize that when Luke's character did that." Things like that. So that was our hope.

[00:27:03] <music>

Partner: I want to tell you all about a podcast called Israel Story that I've been listening to. Let's face it, Israel can be a tough topic to tackle. Some people love it, others hate discussing it. But Israel Story tells it like it is, beautiful and ugly, ridiculous and heartwarming.

Israel Story is a radio show and a podcast that brings us nuanced, complicated, and beautifully crafted stories from a place where we all think we know a lot about but really don't. If you're looking for the best audio storytelling around not just from the Middle East, but from anywhere, this is the show for you.

Hosted by Mishy Harman and produced in partnership with Tablet Magazine and the Jerusalem Foundation, Israel Story tells extraordinary stories about ordinary people, tales you won't see or hear anywhere else.

According to none other than the amazing storyteller Ira Glass himself, Israel Story is the This American Life of Israel. That's my experience listening to it. It really does feel like This American Life. But it's all stories about Israel. It's the number one Jewish podcast in the world. And it regularly takes listeners from 194 countries on unforgettable, quirky, interesting, and moving journeys through the country. Search for it wherever you love listening to podcasts, and then subscribe and listen and enjoy Israel Story today.

And now back to finish our conversation with Aaron and Luke.

[00:28:34] <music>

Annie: Luke, what's your interest in being in films like this?

Luke: I love art. I study art. I am moving into the arena of being a filmmaker. I directed my first short that's going around right now. It premiered last night at HollyShorts.

Aaron: Wooo!.

Annie: Well done. And then you got up early to talk to me. I'm a monster. I'm so sorry.

Luke: No, it's fine. Totally fine. But yeah, Opening Night. So that one well.

Annie: Well done.

Luke: So I care about storytelling immensely. And one thing that I think holds faith-based films back is the message. I think that a lot of these storytellers are so focused on getting their message across that they forget that they're supposed to be telling a story.

Annie: Wow.

Luke: In its truest form, you look at a painting and you're not told what to think. You look at a painting and things jump out to you. I think film is obviously much longer format, but when you watch a film, it shouldn't be pandered to you what you're supposed to get from it or pandered to you good guys, bad guys. It should be a beautiful Kaleidoscope and certain things jump out to you. And each person it sparks dialogue because it is controversial in the sense that someone's going to think something and someone's going to think another thing.

That's what I think art is and that's what I think God is. You know, He created this world of balance. He created this world of good and evil. He created this world. And I think that if we truly want to tell stories that show God, I think that we need to tell both stories. I think we need to show this crazy, tumultuous and beautiful world all in the same and not dumb it down and not pander our views just for the sheer trying to get our point across as clear as possible.

I think that a lot of times filmmakers can sometimes worry that the audience isn't going to understand it. But I think that if we really want to make great films, we have to have faith that the audience is going to get it.

Annie: Y'all can totally correct me if I'm wrong, but it feels like you were talking about the difference between making art and making propaganda for God.

Aaron: Wow. Good way to put it.

Luke: Yeah.

Aaron: Yeah, absolutely.

Annie: Is that it? Because I wrestle with that when I'm writing books. It's like I don't want to convince anybody of anything. I want to tell the story and trust that the faith that we have is bigger than my ability to convince someone of anything.

Aaron: Well, it's not your job to convince me, Annie, is it?

Annie: No.

Aaron: Let's let God be God. He's pretty good at it last time I checked.

Annie: Right.

Aaron: Here's the bottom line for me in this. If we're honest in our storytelling, if we're honest in our life, if we're honest in our motivations, think about that, the motivations that we take into life, if you really check it, I mean, that's when you really can begin to get to the place of whatever the story that's coming out of you, whether your story is to be a business owner and you have employees that... I mean, be honest, man. Whether you're a father, a mother, whether you're a director, an actor, a book writer like yourself, a podcast host, or hostess, I should say, excuse me, the honesty is where it starts. And that's the hope.

I know in my life I've been guilty. When you mix commerce with art, there's always going to be that rub and that tug. It's always going to be there. I gotta say, in *Playing God*, for the most part, I feel like we tried to tell the story with what it was as best we could, because we did it independently of any studio, we did it independently of any publisher, or whatever. Too is trying to tell us and have a thumb on the back of my neck as far as how can you tell the story.

And because of that, it was a beautiful way for us to be able to tell as well as we did. Now, we made some mistakes. I mean, we had to go back and do some reshoots, because once we got to the end we realized wow, there were some dots that weren't connected, and so we lived and learned by that and it cost us some money. But we made it. But the point is, let's be honest guys, let's be honest in all that we do in life. And I think that's where the truth is.

[00:32:59] <music>

Sponsor: Hey Friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about another one of our incredible partners Liquid IV. As your friend, the Enneagram 7, you know I love spontaneity, but I'm also a creature of habit, especially when it comes to my morning routine.

Keeping the rhythm of drinking tea, reading, journaling, and prayer to start my day really fuels me to step into the rest of my day at my best. And another way to make sure we stay fueled and healthy is by keeping hydration a priority. Just one stick of Liquid IV in my water bottle hydrates me faster and more efficiently than water alone. Not only that, but Liquid IV tastes great with flavors like watermelon, strawberry, lemon-lime.

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That's 25% off anything you order when you get better hydration today using the promo code THAT SOUNDS FUN at liquid iv.com.

[00:34:29] <music>

Annie: Aaron, what got you into making movies? How do you go from touring artists to movie producer?

Aaron: Annie, come on, man. A touring artist is a young man's game. Come on.

Annie: Listen, you're not kidding. Tell me about it. I'm with you.

Aaron: You know honestly it was me back in the day when I was touring and coming in and off the set with Luke and just hanging out. I was just the actor's dad when I would show up. But I would watch and learn and listen and talk to producers, and I suddenly realized quickly that their skill sets were ones that I had as well, meaning even in the music space, I loved taking an entire kind of idea and/or thought and looking at all the ways to make it work because there's a lot of pieces to that puzzle. Similarly in film, it's just different mediums.

Secondly, I saw that a lot of producers are good connectors and relational from the standpoint of how they get their projects done. And that's one space that I feel like that I love and have excelled in my life thankfully. So, man, this is a world that I think I wanted. It's another way to tell stories. I'm still in the music side of things as well in a lot of ways and songwriter and things but man, most of my folks now my time is spent really developing and creating content and TV and film. And I'm loving every minute.

Annie: That is really fun. Luke, can you sing too?

Luke: Yeah. I guess I toured in middle school.

Aaron: You did.

Annie: You toured in middle school? Young man's game for real. What? How did you tour in middle school? What does that even mean? Are you Justin Bieber?

Aaron: He was before Bieber, man. He was the Bieber before Bieber.

Luke: I had the Bieber cut and everything.

Annie: Luke! My Google game is about to get so strong over here finding middle school Luke.

Aaron: It's called I Shine.

Annie: I Shine. Okay.

Luke: I played it a lot at youth groups and travel around to churches all across.

Aaron: That was fun.

Luke: It was. It was a blast.

Annie: So what y'all are both really modeling for us is the gifts and the skill set you have can be really done in multiple venues. Like pay more attention to your skills, then the opportunity in front of you a little bit. Because you're both going like, "Hey, I found a way to tell a story and then I found another way to tell a story." Does that feel true?

Luke: Yeah, that's very true. I think that you kind of have to keep your eyes open in all scenarios. I definitely took a step back from music after a bit of it. I care a ton about art. The business side of both of these industries are just way too much for me. They're overwhelming. Film it kind of has an interesting divide. Obviously, I think you have to be savvy on both sides. If you're a producer, you do need to have some creative savvy and then vice versa. But music just felt like it was 90% business and then 10% creating. So that's kind of why I took a step back. But I still love singing and I do think it's important to obviously keep yourself diversified.

My mom ingrained that in me young. She forced me to... not forced. I did like doing what she would make me do. Like hip hop classes. She's like, "You have to know how to dance as well. It's going to be important." And I'm like, "Mom..." And sure enough it has paid off. I'm sure it will pay off again.

Annie: The day it does. I'm going to text you and to be like, "Luke, this is why. This is why you had to take those classes."

Luke: It's really.

Annie: Aaron, what are you working on now?

Aaron: Currently, we are in post-production on a movie called *Chasing Oslo* that I'm really excited about. It's a young adult movie that talks about influencers in that space. It's a documentary within a feature if that makes sense. A young filmmaker follows her strange best friend as her best friend has discovered that the biggest influencer in the world, Oslo Green is unplugged from his social media platform. And she's got to figure out why and there's got to be something wrong. And they go on this kind of crazy journey to find this Oslo Green guy.

And through it all, man, it's really a story of the fact that we all have a voice, and it's a matter of what we do with it, large or small. And then when we get what we want, is really what we want, as well as a story of forgiveness. So it's really cool. It's really quirky. I'm in love with the story. And so we're in post on that.

Currently also working on a show with Peacock that is about a football program. It's called *God Family Football*. That should be out here next year, which I'm excited about. And it's really a story my mentor [inaudible 00:39:44] and my mentor [inaudible 00:39:46] and then Denny Duron and Evangel Christian Academy down in Shreveport, Louisiana.

Annie: Wait, is that DawnChéré dad?

Aaron: He sure is. He sure is.

Annie: I was like, "Wait, I know that name."

Aaron: He sure is. He's DawnChéré's father. Yeah

Annie: Wow.

Aaron: And then Luke's short, boys, I was a producer on that with him and we have won some festivals and now we just, like he said, opened the Hollywood Shorts last night. We're hoping we're going to make a run to try to get on the Oscar nominations list. It's an incredible little short film that I'm proud of my boy, the vision he had for it, and how he executed as his first time to direct.

And then Luke is also on other project we're working on together that I'm really excited about is a musical that Luke is writing the script for, and will also be one of the stars of that. It's kind of very beginning stages of. It's a lot of things, man. I love having a lot of different plates spinning and it's guiding for me. And then on the music side, I still write a lot of music and things like that for TV and film and things.

Annie: That's awesome. Okay, Luke writing a musical...

Luke: Yeah.

Annie: Let's go.

Luke: It's a stretch in a new area. But it's going well. I'm excited.

Aaron: Luke's great at writing. Of course, he won't toot his own horn. How many scripts have you written now? About five, six movies?

Luke: I've written about probably three and then one, I adapted a book. The other one basically we got the rights for a script and then I rewrote it. So handful and then a bunch of shorts. So it's fun.

Annie: Dude.

Luke: Honestly, it kind of even deepened my understanding, even just from an acting sense, to understand how much goes into the words on the page and being able to decipher obviously, the truth of the scene, but what the true intent was for the words that the writer put down. It gave me even more insight into the motivations behind these characters. I do really enjoy it.

I'm trying to figure out what's next. I guess my hope would be, whatever's next for me is, as a filmmaker, would be something that I've also written. This short was written by a friend of mine, David Mandel. So I think the goal would be something I wrote.

Aaron: So many things about Luke I admire and love, obviously, being my boy. But one of the things pertaining to this is what I've learned from him and continue to learn is the fact that the art is first. Now he's 26. My wife and I are no longer making his decisions kind of for him. Before he was 18, so to speak, and with him. Now it's him as a man, as an artist, as a creator making the decisions for his own career.

He is not a compromiser. That's such a great trait. He's one that leads with the art and the creativity. And if it doesn't speak to him, no matter what it is, I've seen him go, "You know what, I'm just not resonating with that" and therefore, turns it down. He doesn't involve himself in the process of potentially getting the role.

Also with writing, yeah, he's a great actor and will continue that in his career. But what people don't understand is he could be the next Ron Howard. He's a writer, he's a director, he's a visionary, he's an actor, he's a creative. And he always leads with that. That's going to afford him well. As someone who struggles with compromising potentially the creative for the pursuit of career and business and finances, I oftentimes have thought and I learned from my boy that way and I commend him on this.

Luke: Thanks, pops. Thanks, boss.

Annie: Real nice. Luke, I've got that all recorded if you need to hear it again.

Annie: You can hear that any time.

Aaron: All because of me. All these hip hop moves, right here, this guy.

Annie: That's also right. I believe that. So we can watch *Playing God* on Amazon app, all the places we love to stream movies at home. Luke, can we watch the short somewhere?

Luke: Not yet. Well, it's going around to festivals. I'm keeping up to date on my Instagram a little bit on what it's playing next. I think we have San Jose coming up soon on Star Film Festival, which is in Texas. You're not really supposed to put it online in a public format until after you get through all the festivals. So once we get through everything, then it'll be up on Vimeo or YouTube or whatever for everyone to see potentially.

Annie: Once it...

[crosstalk 00:44:31]

Annie: ...we'll all get to watch it.

Luke: Yeah.

Aaron: Exactly.

Annie: That's awesome. You guys, thank you for making time for this. Let me ask you our final question.

Aaron: Okay. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun, I need to know, tell me what sounds fun to y'all.

Luke: I'm gradually relieving myself of the pandemic mindset. I'm vaccinated. I got Delta strain probably like four weeks ago. So I've got the antibodies that I'm like, "All right, now I need to get rid of my gut." So what I'm excited about right now is I'm back to the ball again, which is... it was a long time of... I have a very competitive nature, thanks to my pops, and that was really needed to exercise again. I had been really like... You know, video games are cool but I want to get out there and compete with my whole body. So that's what sounds fun to me right now is like I'm back to being active and playing that ball game.

Aaron: What sounds fun to me is anything that my wife and I can do in our empty nest. We were married at 20, we had Luke at 21, we had our other daughters by the time we were 27. We have been raising kids since we were married. Okay. Our youngest is in college, Luke is on his own, Gracie is married and Kenda and I are just absolutely having the best in our life, doing whatever the hell we want. Can I say that on your podcast?

Annie: Absolutely.

Aaron: If not, whatever the heck we want. Honestly, we are having a ball and in love more than ever before. We take trips, we travel together, we hang out together and we just-

Luke: Look like a...

Aaron: Yeah, dude.

Annie: You do whatever you want because you've got all the time in the world.

Aaron: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Annie: That's awesome. Well, thank you guys both for making time for this. I can't wait for our friends to watch *Playing God*. It's an excellent film. We're going to track with both of y'all so that we get to keep watching all the good stuff you're making.

Aaron: Annie, you're awesome. Bless you in your endeavors and all you're doing. We love it. Thank you so much for having us.

[00:46:57] <outro music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, don't you love them? That was so fun. What interesting insight into a world that I do not know very much about? Listen, Luke and Aaron are first on our call sheet. That's for sure they are first on our call sheet. Be sure to watch their new movie, *Playing God*, in theaters and on-demand. Everywhere you love to watch movies on-demand at home you can find it. And make sure you follow them, tell them thanks so much for being on the show. And I cannot wait to hear your thoughts after you watch *Playing God*. I really liked it. I think you will too.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that's how you can find me. And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same. Have a great weekend and we will see you guys on Monday.

[00:47:48] <music>