



Emma and the Squares



UNMUTE YOURSELF.

SYNOPSIS

It's Emma's birthday. Time to celebrate!

...Except that it's April 2020, everyone is under lockdown, and she lives alone.

Can she squeeze her three-dimensional friends and family into a single two-dimensional gathering -- or will all the quirks, smirks, and jerks make this birthday one for the ages?

Inspired by a bevy of virtual birthday parties, the Sondheim musical Company, and a plethora of Christopher Guest films, Emma and the Squares is what happens when a group of actors play with themes of isolation, connection, and companionship. And during a pandemic... who needs a script for that?!



MEET THE DIRECTOR

Elisabeth Ness is an award-winning producer, performer, editor, and creative entrepreneur -- who suddenly found herself adding "director" to that list out of necessity during the pandemic!

The Yale alumna's drive to make a positive impact on the world inspired her, in 2014, to co-found **Good Porpoise Productions**, which makes socially-conscious fiction and mini-documentaries for non-profits. She has been honored as one of Take the Lead's "50 Women Can Change the World in Media & Entertainment", and her work has been called "especially funny" (NY Times), "razor-sharp" (Washington Post), and "hilarious" (Times Herald-Record, Catskill Chronicle).

Elisabeth created the hit digital comedy **Redheads Anonymous**, which was featured in USA Today, Huffington Post, and Tubefilter, and for which she received a nomination for 'The Raindance Discovery Award' (London). The series so far has garnered **over 13 awards and 26 nominations at festivals worldwide**, including her and the rest of her writing team's win for 'Best Sitcom Screenplay' at the Rome Web Awards.

Recent producing and concept credits also include Coming Down to the Wire ('**Best Funny Music Video**' nom, Women's Comedy Film Fest in Atlanta), Trigger (an '**Audience Choice Award**' winner at Blackbird Film Festival), and En Route ('Best Of' AGR). Onscreen roles include the upcoming Stella in **The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel** (Amazon), Sara in Bull (CBS), Rose in Like Father (Netflix, with Kelsey Grammer), Daredevil (Marvel), FBI (CBS), Trigger ('Best Actress' nom, SSIFFF), Going Public (SOHO International), and En Route ('Best Lead Actress' nom, Blackbird Film Fest).



WHY A ZOOM FILM?

I've created this quarantine film to show how **people can find humor, connection, and creative opportunity** during an isolating time.

We experienced so many issues during lockdown, many of which I'm grateful to delve into in this film: **isolation versus connection**, wanting to **take care of each other** but only really being able (physically and mentally) to **focus on ourselves**, how **lonely** it can feel when you're **in a virtual room with others instead of physically together** -- and of course that eerie, uncomfortable moment at the end of a meeting when **the curtain is pulled back** because everyone else has left, and it suddenly feels as though **they were never really there**.

When it comes down to it, **is Emma more alone when she's "with" all her friends on Zoom**, or when she's alone with her stuffed animal, in "real life"? And, **which would she rather be?**

HOW EMMA CAME TO BE

The last thing Elisabeth Ness (the creator/director) saw on Broadway -- the night before the shutdown -- was **Sondheim's musical** exploration of aloneness and togetherness, '**Company**'.

APRIL
2020

Meanwhile, still inspired by 'Company', Elisabeth kept pondering the interplay between people who were riding out the quarantine while single, and those who were holed up with a companion of some sort. **How could she explore that drastic difference in experience, while only using Zoom to tell the story?**

MARCH
2020

While Elisabeth and her partner recovered from COVID-19 (0/10, do not recommend), **laughter was the best medicine** – administered via a cornucopia of **Christopher Guest films**.
Marveling at the fun ensemble of actors he got to play around with, they realized it might be possible to **translate Guest's filmmaking process to the scant resources at their disposal (read: Zoom)**. Like Guest, they'd choose an **ensemble of improv performers**, craft their characters with them, write a (in Elisabeth's case, four page) outline for the actors to follow, and then spend months editing the resulting footage in the way one would a documentary.

APRIL
2020

HOW EMMA CAME TO BE

Thus, the experiment began!

MAY
2020



As luck would have it, Elisabeth attended a handful of **virtual birthday parties** during the first few months of lockdown, and the **unique characters and zany moments** in them – including the aunt so afraid of COVID that she yelled at the birthday girl anytime she touched her face, the kid so cute no one could focus on anything else, and the friend who baked a treat for the birthday boy and then proceeded to eat it in front of them – seemed **ideal for a Guest-like touch**, and rife with opportunity to delve into the **themes of connection and isolation** that the pandemic had brought to bear.

Turns out, a **large group Zoom of improvising actors is nigh-impossible** to film properly. So, that was saved for the **pièce-de-resistance** -- the **singing of "happy birthday"**. Meanwhile, **all the other conversations had to be filmed separately and pieced together in post**, to appear as though everyone had been in the same room the whole time, reacting and chatting with each other... requiring **15 months of painstaking editing!**



JUNE
2020

Elisabeth is grateful for the talented cast that was **willing to embark on this experiment amidst a pandemic** that was crushing creatives' souls (if not their bodies, as well).

The team hopes **this comedy about connection, isolation, and companionship during a trying time can provide inspiration** for other creatives. We hope that viewers will see themselves and their experiences reflected on the screen. ...And, most importantly, we hope they laugh.

Because laughter really is the best medicine.

SEPTEMBER
2021



MEET THE SQUARES PT. 1



MARCUS GOLDHABER
MONDAYS WITH MARCUS

SHIRINE BABB:
BLUE BLOODS, MADAM
SECRETARY,
BROADWAY'S HARRY
POTER & THE CURSED
CHILD



KEVIN SEBASTIAN:
THE MARVELOUS
MRS. MAISEL,
BLUE BLOODS
MURPHY BROWN

MARY LINEHAN:
STONED (CANNES
SHORT), MY NEW
PANTS, BRYANT PARK
SHAKESPEARE



STEPHANIE TORNIS:
ORIGINAL BROADWAY
CAST OF WAITRESS

BENNY ELLEDGE:
LITTLE VOICE, FBI:
MOST WANTED,
SNEAKY PETE,
GOTHAM



KATHY MCCAFFERTY:
LAW & ORDER: SVU,
LITTLE AMERICA,
HOUSE OF CARDS, 30
ROCK



DENISE CORMIER:
THE AFFAIR, LAW &
ORDER: CRIMINAL
INTENT



CYNTHIA WHITMAN:
LE CREUSET, NEXT
SEAT APP



ALAN SAFIER:
SAY GOODNIGHT
GRACIE, ASSASSINS,
BROADWAY BOUND



VERONICA DANG:
THE LAST O.G.,
THE FOLLOWING,
LAW & ORDER: SVU

MEET THE SQUARES PT.2



ADRIENNE WHITE:
THE WITCH FILES,
ANOTHER GIRL, SWIPE
RIGHT

ADAM WEBER:
TIMELESS, PROXY KILL,
VARSITY PUNKS



AARON BALLARD:
LAW & ORDER: SVU,
LITTLE AMERICA,
BROKERS

GUS BALLARD



ELISABETH NESS:
THE MARVELOUS MRS.
MAISEL, FBI, DAREDEVIL,
BULL, REDHEADS
ANONYMOUS

**NATHAN NOLEN
EDWARDS:**
SITTING ON BABIES



JENNA SOFIA:
SIDE PIECE,
GIRL/GROUP,
SUMMER & SMOKE

REIN SÁNCHEZ



PAGE CLEMENTS:
EXTRA INNINGS, THE
SONNET PROJECT



SARAH SEEDS:
INSIDE AMY SCHUMER,
AMERICAN FANGO,
THE MINT



KAREN LANGE:
ASSASSINS, HENRY IV I
& II, HAPPY DAYS
PERRY LANGE



KATHERINE DUDAS:
WAKING UP
WORRIED, JUNIPER,
THIS IS SERIOUS

Behind the Scenes/Computer

DIRECTOR / CREATOR
ELISABETH NESS

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR & ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
ED NESBOT

EDITOR
ELISABETH NESS

EDITING CONSULTANTS
NIKKI COBLE
KEVIN SEBASTIAN
ED NESBOT
BIMINI WRIGHT

VISUAL EFFECTS & CREDITS GRAPHICS
ED NESBOT

POST SOUND MIXER
MARCELO TESON

POSTER GRAPHICS
KEVIN SEBASTIAN

ADDITIONAL EDITING CONSULTANTS

SARAH SEEDS
DANIELLE BOURGEOIS
RILEY THOMAS
AARON BALLARD
JENNA SOFIA
KAREN LANGE
VERONICA DANG
MICHAEL GREW
ADRIENNE WHITE
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LET'S HANG OUT... VIRTUALLY!

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