

THE RESISTANCE – EPISODE 1.2

Lynn Renee Maxcy interview - Episode Transcript

Lynn Renee Maxcy: What if this is it? What if this show you're working on now, like what if this is your last job? What if no one will ever hire you again? What if everyone realizes that you have just been faking it all along?

[music]

Matt: Welcome to The Resistance, a podcast that features honest discussion with meaningful artists about the opposing forces we all face when moving toward our better selves. I'm your host, Matt Conner.

The phrase “fake it ‘til you make it” exists for a good reason. We all feel like frauds from time to time.

Lynn Renee Maxcy has every reason to believe she's made it. As a writer living in Los Angeles, she could be just another number. After all, in LA, everyone's either an actor, or a writer, or a director, even if they're actively doing something else, like making your cup of coffee or watching your kids or serving your food. However, her considerable talents and hard work have helped her to arrive. She's not just another number, at least not anymore. She's a writing success.

Lynn's journey to real Hollywood achievements began when she wrote a few episodes for the hit USA series *Covert Affairs*. From there, she joined the writing team for *The Handmaid's Tale*, the sensational Emmy-winning series on Hulu, set to begin its third season this summer. These days, Lynn even has her first feature film, called *The Complex*, currently in production.

Given her success, why does Lynn have such a hard time identifying herself as a writer? She writes every day. She writes for a living. And ever since she was eight years old, she says this is the thing she's always wanted to do. Why are terms like “fake” or “fraud” even in orbit in her head when she's enjoying as much success as she is as a writer? The resistance.

The resistance has a way of making all of us feel less than we really are. It tells us that we're nothing, and that the others who try to encourage us are lying. It's a universal force that seeks to push all of us down, whether we're writers hoping to break through, or writers who have had success.

Today's conversation with Lynn Renee Maxcy pushes back against the resistance with some honest and vulnerable discussion about the lies we all believe and how we can begin to work our way past them.

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Matt: Lynn, how are you today?

Lynn: I'm great. Thank you so much for having me.

Matt: Here on The Resistance, we are beginning each of our interviews this season by reading just a couple sentences from a book called *The War of Art*, which is our source material for the entire podcast. Pressfield calls the resistance anything that keeps us from being the person that we say that we want to be or that we're meant to be. So Lynn, I was hoping I could read a couple sentences for you and just get your response to it based on where you're at today.

Lynn: Sounds great.

Matt: Most of us have two lives: the life we live, and the unlive life within us. Between the two stands resistance. Lynn, I'd love just to hear from you, in your own creative battles or just in day-to-day life, what resistance looks like to you and your relationship with it.

Lynn: Such a great question. I love that quote so much. I think for me, the thing that I've seen is there's always this version of myself that's some future version. When I was a kid, it was, when I'm one of the cool high school kids, or when I was in high school it was like, ugh, god, if I could just get to college, or when I get to be an adult, when I get to be some future version of myself, I hope that I'm like this. I hope that I'm creating these kind of stories. I hope that I'm making this kind of art. And those kind of dreams are amazing and helpful, and I think that they really propel us forward into actually becoming an artist, whether a professional artist or otherwise.

But I think to speak to that resistance piece of it, that is kind of that massive chasm we have to figure out a way through, there's a lot of work involved and a lot of risk, and a lot of deciding what your priorities are. Deciding what you're going to give up. Deciding, okay if I'm all in, what does that mean?

And a lot of times it's easy to take the path of least resistance, and it's kind of scary to think about being a musician, or it's kind of scary to think about being a writer, because I would have to give up steady income, or I would have to do this crazy thing and have everybody around me think that I'm kind of insane. It's a lot of hard work and a lot of sitting in my office alone with my computer, writing while everyone is out having fun. So I think there's this constant struggle to bridge that chasm and sit and do the hard, boring, difficult work that it's just a constant battle to keep moving forward into the person and the artist that you really want to be.

Matt: You've been living in Los Angeles now, earlier we were talking and you said it's been a decade.

Lynn: Yes. So crazy.

Matt: I'm assuming resistance in Los Angeles feels different than in other places. Were you prepared for that, heading into it?

Lynn: In some ways, yes. I think just, I knew I wanted to be a writer when I was eight years old, so I kind of constantly had this, people being curious about what I was doing and why I was doing it, and that's a weird job, why don't you want to go do some other normal job? And so I was kind of used to it in that way, but in Los Angeles, there's a completely different side that I don't think I really saw coming.

In some ways, it's great. You end up with all of the drama, choir, musician, artist kids from all over the country and all over the world end up in Los Angeles. You kind of get here and go, awesome! These are my people. I'm not crazy. Oh my gosh. You, too? There's a sense of we're all in this together, which is great. But then you go from being the only writer in your high school, or the only writer that you know to sitting in the circle with tons of other writers, and there's a sense of what am I doing here? All of these other people are so much better at this than I am. They're so much funnier, prettier, more talented. What now?

So it's very easy to be like, oh. No, no, no, no, no. They should be the ones here. Not me. And it's just a different kind of flavor of that same resistance of an artist asking themselves, who am I? What am I doing? Can I actually do this? Is this a viable way to spend my entire life? It's crazy. I love Los Angeles. I'm delighted that I live here. But it is a very intense, crazy place, for sure.

Matt: I wonder if you found the same flavor. Just yesterday, I was reading an interview with a musician who had moved after nearly a decade in Los Angeles to Nashville. And he said, both towns ask the

question, “What can you do for me?” But he said Nashville flips it. In LA, it’s “what can you do for me,” and in Nashville, it’s “what can I do for you,” knowing you’re going to do the same for the other person. And he sounded quite happy to be in Nashville. Curious if that resonates with you as the reality there in LA.

Lynn: Yeah. Definitely. I’ve definitely been at parties and networking events where you start talking to someone and they’re kind of, who are you, why am I talking to you? Looking over your shoulder, looking for the cooler person to talk to. Because there’s a sense of, well if you can’t do XYZ for me, why am I talking to you? There are other people I need to talk to. I only have a specific amount of time, and this party only goes until midnight. Bye.

But I think it also depends on, at least in my experience in LA, it depends on the people that you’re with. There are definitely a majority of people who say kind of the “what can you do for me” version. But then, it helps if you find other awesome people who will come alongside you, and you know you flip the narrative in the way that it sounds like the narrative in Nashville is flipped to, hey what can I do for you? Because I know that next week, you’re going to ask me that same question back. And it’s, you’re both doing things for each other. It’s just, it’s like a heart, like a heart shift, a way of just approaching the world differently, of like, I’m here to help. I’m here to create. I’m here to collaborate. And if you can do that, the world is so much better, and life is so much more fun.

Matt: I feel like I’m talking to you in an obvious after- scenario. What’s the kind of conversation you and I would have about resistance let’s say 5 to 7 years ago versus the one we’re having now, where you have enjoyed some obvious success. Like, you’ve been to the Emmys. You have a, a megahit and me and my wife are two of the rabid fans wondering what’s going to happen next [Lynn laughs] in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. So --

Lynn: Ah, if only I could tell you. [laughs]

Matt: [laughs] We’ll, we’ll talk later. No, I guess what I really wonder is now, your relationship with resistance, does it feel like a relationship that’s in the rearview mirror, that you can reflect upon? Or what does resistance look like in its very current, today is Wednesday, form for you on the other side of enjoying some success?

Lynn: Yeah. I mean, I wish it was in the rearview mirror. That would make my life so much easier. I think the question of what the resistance would have looked like 5-7 years ago for me, it would have been a completely different thing, because you’re kind of, you know I was trying to write with this sense of I think this is what I’m supposed to do. I think this is why I was put on earth. And yet I didn’t really have anything to back that up. Like, I loved writing, people liked what I was writing, but there was nothing that I could point to and say, “Yeah here. Look, I wrote this script. I got it made, I made this movie. “

So it just sort of felt like this push toward some unknown future, where any, you know many forms of resistance kind of come in and say, “Who are you and why would you think you could do this? I mean, how long have you been in LA and you haven’t done anything yet? Are you sure this is what you’re supposed to be doing?” You know, it’s very insidious and easy to kind of fall prey to that.

I think I’m stunned and utterly delighted that I have been lucky enough to have success with awesome people around me. It’s been, you know, the most ridiculous, fun, wonderful adventure of my life. But you know, there’s still the, the resistance always takes a different form. And the questions, while the core of it is the same, that kind of like, “Who are you to do this? Wouldn’t it be easier to go do this other thing?”

But the question changes a little bit to, “Well what if this is it? What if the show you’re working on now, like what if this is your last job? What if no one will ever hire you again? What if everyone realizes that you have just been faking it all along and making it up as you go along, and you know you’re not real?” Then like I kind of have to step back and be like, “No I’m literally making it up as I go along. That’s my job. I’m a professional make-it-up-as-I-go-along person.”

So you kind of, you still have to fight, and hopefully, having had some success, I mean, cross my fingers, I’ll be able to fight back against the voice of resistance a little more effectively, but, you know, I’m still human. I’m still me. I’m still the same person that, in a lot of ways, I was 5 years ago. I just have a really cool show that I work on now. Otherwise, I’m still me. I still can freak myself out about creativity and writing and the future.

Matt: Have you always been, I feel like certain people may be programmed, or their personality allows them to have a healthier relationship with resistance than others. Have you always had sort of a strong certitude, like in terms of your ability to overcome what you call those insidious voices?

Lynn: I think I knew that I wanted to write, and I loved writing so much from such a young age, that I kind of didn’t have the ability to separate Lynn from writer, which has been a really good thing in my life and a really hard thing in my life. But I think that there was, I feel like there was no way for me to separate those two, so when I had those moments of crushing doubt, and terror, and like, am I really meant to do this? It’s like, well, yeah. Because I exist. I exist. I’m Lynn. I’m a writer. Those two things kind of came as a peace.

So I think it helped me to continue on. But again it can be, that was a really good thing that can be really hard and dangerous because there was always the question of, “Well, what if you can’t do this? Then what are you? You’ve wanted to do this since you were eight. What if you’ve been wrong since you were eight? “That’s a crazy, nasty question, that I was like, “I do not want the answer to that. Thank you.”

Matt: Can you go into more detail on that? Like you’re talking about differentiation there. But you talked about as if, like that’s something that’s happened. So when did that happen for you? Or when did you do that work? And when you say there’s a good and a bad side to it, like I guess I’d just love to know more of your exploration there.

Lynn: Hopefully I’m answering the right question here. You can definitely tell me if I’m not. I think, I think for me a lot of the work came in a really protected way, because I was so young. You know, I’m 9 years old. I’m in 3rd grade. I’m not thinking about can I do this professionally. Like, I should probably finish elementary school first. Thanks. I was able to just kind of explore being a writer, and I could write and I could love it.

It wasn’t until I was in high school and early university years, thinking, am I going to be able to do this professionally? And that was when I really had to dig in and kind of find my identity as a writer and as Lynn together but also, I had to find my identity as Lynn separately. I had to go be a person. I had to have friends. And hang out with people and meet people and go work at a coffee shop and all this kind of stuff. That helped me differentiate and live my life in a way that I had things to talk about and stories to tell.

I’m trying to think of a really good way to, to say all of this. But I think being able to have that early, those early years where I wasn’t thinking about doing it professionally, I just did it, I think kind of gave me a really strong foundation, and a really, I got to kind of learn my craft in a way that I didn’t even realize I was doing, because I just got to sit and write. So I’m, I’ve always been incredibly grateful, being an artist, and it’s weird to refer to myself as that at all. I’m like, I don’t know.

Matt: Is it? Even now?

Lynn: Yeah. Artists are like Monet and Shakespeare. And like, art? What? No. I'm Lynn. It's weird. Um, but I think that, that kind of creativity has been with me my entire life. And yeah, it's a battle. It's, it's scary and hard, but it's also, what else am I going to do?

Matt: Is that ever the battle for you to get back to those, you know, you were describing your earliest days with a sense of innocence and freedom. It happens so often with some of the musicians I'll talk to, where they say, when we made our first album, we just made music. There was no thought that a label may want us to cut this certain kind of track or that fans may make these demands. We were just making music to make music. And there's a beauty to that innocence there. Is there a battle to sort of protect that initial innocent impulse that got you going in the first place?

Lynn: [laughs] Totally. I think it looks very similar for a writer that it, for me, as it would for musicians, kind of being able to just make their first album and kind of have that, oh no, this is a thing we're doing for us. And hopefully there's success in the future, but right now it's just, it's us and it's protected.

You know, it's like me sitting down to write the first draft of a TV pilot that is just mine and my own creation, that nobody knows I'm writing. My agent and manager don't know. My friends don't know. I get to just kind of be me and be in my head and create and tell a story. It is a completely different experience when you're kind of doing, you're creating, with the public's eye on you.

We had a, a similar experience on *The Handmaid's Tale* where Season 1, they hadn't announced the show yet. We were just us in the writer's room creating the show. We had a pretty good idea we were making a pretty great show, but also, nobody knew about it. I would go and tell people, "I'm working on a show." And no one knew about it, and people were kind of like, "Oh, wasn't that a novel a long time ago? I think I read it." It was that, as opposed to going back for Season 2 and now, the eyes of the world are upon you. Like, don't screw this up. It's a scary thing.

But I think it, there is always that initial protective, no like I'm the same person I was when I was doing the first version of this. When I was recording the first album as opposed to the second, like you can still get back to that creative core, that this is why you do what you do. For me as a writer, I love to write. And if I'm having huge success, awesome. If I'm not, that's terrible, but I still get to like curl up with my laptop and create. And like that's the piece that I love. That's what I'm pursuing.

Matt: Can you, can you take us behind, by the way, what is, what is the makeup of the writing team for *The Handmaid's Tale*? How many writers are there at work on a season?

Lynn: So there's nine of us in the room and then our amazing assistants as well, so it's a pretty good-sized team for a show like this. But we go hard and fast the whole season and need every single one of us all the time.

Matt: I guess I'm curious. Some of the impulses and, and some of the aspects of resistance that we're talking about are so universal. I feel like everyone can identify with starting with that blank slate and, and the fear of putting pen to paper and who will care, who will validate this. But I think very few can identify with maybe the fears that you could be experiencing, or the resistance that you could be experiencing now, which is what do you do when you have something that has these massive expectations and a massive audience and awards for what has come before?

I'm wondering, then, how does that resistance feel and is it, is it helped by having community around you, versus, like it's all on your shoulders kind of a thing? I just wonder if, does the room ever talk about the resistance you feel as you walk back in to write another season?

Lynn: Yes. [laughs] For sure. But I think there, to go back to something you were saying earlier, it's that community piece that's incredibly important. Writing can be an incredibly lonely task. It's great and wonderful, and you're kind of living with all the characters in your head so you don't feel alone, but you are alone a lot of the time. You are, you know, you, in your office, with your computer, and the rest of the world kind of falls away. It's important to have the community around you.

This is one of my own personal soapboxes that none of us were ever meant to make it through this world alone. And yes, absolutely that looks like professional collaboration. And I probably would have died trying to do something like *The Handmaid's Tale* alone, which is why you don't do it alone. You do it with a team. You collaborate. You work together. You're all kind of giving your absolute best, and then, when you can't do a specific piece of it, you get to pass it along to someone else who can come and say, "I'm in this with you. We've got this. We're all in this together. We're the same people who made earlier seasons of the show. I bet we can do it again."

I can't even say how utterly invaluable it is. You have to have that kind of support and love and connection, because it allows you to be freer, to take the bigger swings, to say the crazier pitches in the room, and trust that people will pick up what you're putting out there and run with it.

But I think that there's also, despite what it feels like sometimes, my entire life is not work. I have amazing friends here in LA that, some of them are in the entertainment industry in tons of different jobs. Some of them have nothing to do with the entertainment industry at all. But again, it comes back to that community.

So I think especially as an artist, it's easy to fall prey to worrying, what am I doing and how am I doing this, and it's really nice to be able to kind of have people that you can go to and be like, "This is hard." And to have them be able to be there to support you and to say, you're not crazy. This is a really difficult day. I'm sorry, like, to show up on your doorstep with coffee and food and wine, and to have a community around you where when you are falling flat on your face, someone else will pick you up and you can borrow their faith for a while to keep going.

[music]

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Stay tuned for a special talk-back session, and join us for our next episode with Hollywood film composer Theodore Shapiro.