

Apple Box Talks – Interview with Laura Collini

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CB: Hello everyone, it's Crystal here, one of your hosts for IATSE 891's podcast, Apple Box Talks.

It's been nearly two years since we released an episode of the podcast, and for many of us, a lot has changed in that time. Our industry, our people, have come through an incredibly challenging two years, and now we take stock of how we want to move forward with this work in the future.

We're hoping to release season two of Apple Box Talks in 2025. Season one introduced you to some of the creative artists and technicians that make up the membership here and gave you a peek behind the curtain, with our episodes focused on helping those new to the industry learn more about what it means to be a part of our local. In season two, we want to take a step back, looking more broadly at IATSE 891's role in both the motion picture industry and the greater labor movement here in BC.

We're really excited about the upcoming interviews and the stories we will get to share with you in 2025. In the meantime, we've gone back to our archive and edited six previously unaired episodes from season one, and we'll be releasing those monthly for the rest of 2024. Since they were recorded in 2022, there are a few dated references, but there's still some excellent stories for you.

So, until we see you fresh again in 2025, pull up an Apple Box and let's talk.

[Theme Song]

CB: IATSE 891 presents Apple Box Talks

HB: The podcast where we get to talk to the very best in entertainment, the artists and technicians of IATSE 891.

CB: From prep to post and everything in between, we create worlds on screens of all sizes.

Welcome to Apple Box Talks. I'm Crystal

HB: and I'm Hillary. This week we're joined by the department that ensures the coffee cups are taken out of the shot and the lines all match up. With credits to their names such as Continuum, Apollo 18, and The Good Doctor.

CB: This week taking their seat on the Apple Box is continuity extraordinaire and member of the script supervising department, Laura Collini. So pull up an apple box, and let's talk!

CB: Welcome Laura!

LC: Hi! Thanks for having me!

CB: Thank you for coming in.

HB: So for someone who doesn't know, listening to the podcast, what does a script supervisor do?

LC: Yeah, a lot! Uh, we are a department of one, we are ultimately there to make sure we get all the footage we need to get cut it together seamlessly, and we are also there to make sure all the continuity is there. Now, why is continuity important? Well, we need it to make sure the story makes sense. Not only is there story continuity, there's physical continuity, dialogue continuity. And we are there as an overall check for all of that. We work very closely with the director, the actors, and with the DP, and we're there to really maintain the integrity of the script.

CB: There really, truly are a million things you're looking out for, you know, costume continuity, dialogue, even the lenses that are on the camera, right?

LC: Yes, definitely. Yeah, I take note of all of that. I guess one of the ways how we keep track of everything is that we make very detailed notes. I basically log and track every single shot, every take. And that log is given to the post production, and ultimately that's how they find the footage and edit it together. So it's very vital information. Any information that's come from the Director or really from any department, I will put on that log and that's how they can go towards the best takes first I guess to start editing, so I work very closely with the post production as well, and with the editor.

CB: so when there's multiple cameras, on a set and there's only one of you, how does that work being one person, looking at one camera? How do you manage that?

LC: Yeah, it's hard you know, I mean you have to look at multiple screens at the same time – but everyone's doing that as well, the director's doing that, we're all looking at that you know. As the script supervisor, we're looking at two things that no one else is looking at or listening for is dialogue, is what the actor's saying makes sense and is it what's scripted? And if not, does it still make sense, you know, ultimately? And actor movement, when do the actors move, when they pick up the glass, when they sit down, I need to take note of all of that because we need to match that continuity for all the different shots that we get. That is what maintains the seamless look of a show. So it looks like it's all happening at once when it's really not. And we shoot it completely out of sequence. So that's why I'm there to keep track of that.

HB: I think you've touched on an important thing that people don't always realize is shooting out of sequence is actually really common. Can you speak a little bit to how you got used to that when you're looking at a script and have to jump around so much?

LC: Yeah, well, I think what helps us in the beginning is we do a full script breakdown, similar to what the ADs do that go through each scene and meticulously sort of put down, you know, what is in this scene, what are the beats of the scene, all the continuity elements like any hair, makeup, costume, wardrobe notes. At the time of the day, you know, all those notes help me track what's going on in the scene. So I can literally look at any scene of the script and say, oh, okay, I know where I am here. I can see what's just come before and what's come after. And so you follow it that way. But yes, you have to read the script a lot many times. And you do your

back-matching notes so you know what's coming. Yeah, you get a lot of questions from actors, directors, everyone about, you know, what's just happened prior to this. You know, what do we cut to next? When was the last time you saw me an actor? You know, so you need to know those answers.

HB: What are back matching notes?

LC: Yeah, so something, let's say an actor gets in an accident, they fall over and break their arm in scene three. So from scene three onwards until whoever it says they don't, maybe they are in a cast. So we know that scene three, four, five continuous on, they have a cast on and maybe in scene 25 they get the cast off. So if I'm shooting scene 26, there's no cast on but if I'm shooting scene 17, this person has a cast on – so I need to remember that, keep track of that, because we do shoot scenes completely out of order. Usually it's location based but it can be for any reason ultimately why it's shot out of order. Yeah.

CB: So can you tell us, like, how do you handle something that's improv or an actor that likes to go off script, as it's called? How do you keep track of that?

LC: Yeah, I try and write down what they say, which is, you know, sometimes the hard part. But it's great. If that's part of the way the show is run, if we're doing comedies and we want them to riff,

then absolutely, that's great. And we'll just keep track of that and we'll make notes of what the favorite ones are for the director and things. Yeah, that's no problem at all. If actors are doing it and it's maybe not wanted as much, then we'll just go back and we'll just remind them of what the line is. You know, that's another one of our jobs there too. We usually sit very close to the actions so we can feed actors their lines or any off-camera dialogue, anything to help them out. We are really there to support the actors, to support the director and their vision.

CB: My second question about actors is, have you ever had someone who just comes in and doesn't know any of their lines and you have to sit there and just feed them their lines the entire time?

LC: Yes, I really have! Yeah, yeah, not for a while, all the actors I work with now are excellent, umm, you know, it's part of their homework, too, to know their lines. But if they do have a tough time, and sometimes the dialogue is really, really difficult, it can be very technical. I am always there to help run the lines with them if they need it beforehand. But yes, I've definitely sat just off the side and just fed the line to them and for them to repeat, which is, you know, it's not ideal. You want to get an authentic performance from them. And that's what the director wants, of course, too. But anything you can do to help with that is what you're there for.

HB: So what characteristics about you make you good at what you do?

LC: Uh, I love movies, and I love TV shows. I think you need to love to tell stories because you are there helping to tell one. And you need to be very patient. You need to be able to read the room a little bit to know when is a good time to bring up any continuity problems because there can be maybe lots of continuity problems but maybe it's not the right time to bring them up maybe telling the actor that this line was slightly different is not the best approach because that might mess with their performance and performance will trump continuity any day and it should. We're there to create a believable, real story and we're there to support that.

HB: So there's sort of a margin of error that you have to be able to work within to make sure that the story is kind of ruling.

LC: Yes, absolutely. I will always bring anything up in confidence with the director and we'll decide whether or not it's worth bringing up. But yes, Absolutely. And it's the same when I talk to the director about certain shots. Do you feel like you have enough coverage on this person? You know, the directors will ask me, do we have it? Do we have enough pieces? And, you know, I will say yes or no, depending on what is sort of required of that scene. Yeah.

CB: Talk to us a little bit about how you got here. How did you start? What was your education? Then what kind of, you know, made you feel like you could transfer into script supervising specifically?

LC: Well, I have a degree in mass communication and public relations, umm, communication is definitely important as a script supervisor, you really are talking to every department, and every department helps you as well so it's really good to have a good relationship with all the departments there. Um, I came to Canada and then I knew I wanted to work in the film and TV industry. I looked at all the jobs there and I saw Script Supervision. I thought, this is really interesting. I love telling stories. I really want to be on set. I want to be in the middle of everything, which is exactly what a script supervisor is. You're right in the middle there where all the action is. And I did some courses just in Script Supervision and on the local film industry. And then I went and worked on short films, and student films, and I practiced, and I volunteered. And I did everything I could to get as much experience. And when you do that, you get to meet a bunch of people in the industry who are working on something else. And they say, hey, why don't you come and work on this with me? And it evolves and you meet new people. And then you get into some good shows there. Yeah. So naturally progressed.

HB: Can you think of a favorite project that you've got to work on?

LC: Oh, well, Continuum was one of them, for sure. That was a really, just a really lovely sci-fi show that was set in Vancouver and shot in Vancouver, which is so rare. Vancouver usually plays any other city but itself. So that was just really fun. I thought it was very well-written, very collaborative, which was a nice feeling.

CB: So because you're in the middle of all of the action, you described a really challenging show you worked on in the snow with a few cameras, no shelter. Can you talk to us about the challenges of your job?

LC: You're really, really busy a lot of the time. It's very hard to leave set. So that's just one of the challenges there. If you want to break, it's hard to find the time for one. But that particular show, yes. It was tough. We were out in the snow in the mountains for six weeks shooting two back -to-back movies. It was before computers and iPads. So I had a giant binder full of paper with all my notes, all the information there. And we were sitting in snowstorms with no shelter because if you couldn't put up a tent, because it would blow away. The weather would change every five minutes. It was half an hour to get down to the bottom to go to the bathroom or to get new food. Yeah, and we were using 16mm handheld cameras, which are very, you know, finicky, at the best of times, but in the cold, that's a whole other element there.

CB: So script supervisors might have it a bit easier now with the new technology, et cetera?

LC: I would say it just streamlines it a little more, yeah.

CB: Can you talk about that transition from actually writing those lines physically down on a piece of paper and covering them with plastic and doing all that stuff to how you've seen it change?

LC: Yeah, well, luckily there's a few programs specifically designed for script supervision. So I guess the nice thing about that is that rather than writing all the notes on multiple pieces of paper, it can automatically, you can write it in one spot and it will automatically go to all the forms that it needs to go to, which is a nice time saver there. But yeah, it was a big transition, you know. It definitely took some time learning the nuances of new technology while still being able to do the job efficiently. It's great though. I really enjoy it now and how I can go between a computer or an iPad, depending on the situation. And if all technology fails, there's still pen and paper, so that still works. Also, no one has to decipher my handwriting, which is nice. I think that's the main thing.

HB: So in a department of one, how does it work when you're training new people? How would you advise someone who wants to get into script supervision?

LC: Yeah, I would definitely look in whatever city they are in to see if there's some courses through either some unions or some film schools and then I would try and contact some script supervisors online and get some advice from them too. Or if there's any shows that they could shadow on. I know I got to shadow a little bit and I've had people come to set and shadow me. And watch me do that job and I would sort of walk them through the steps of what to do in a day. So they could do it with me, it was really good for them just to see the amount of work and what you have to keep up with.

CB: So speaking of day in the life, can you give us what that looks like for you?

LC: Yeah, absolutely. So the prep work is done, so we have read the script numerous times, we have broken it down. We know all the elements of each scene. We've timed the script. And that's something that's very important, particularly in episodic television. They want to know how long the script is running. Because if it's too short, well, we better write some more scenes. And if it's too long, well, maybe we should cut some out because we don't want to waste our time shooting something that will never be seen. So I get to work. We're going to do a blocking of our first scene. So I am there with the director and the actors for blocking. So we're running through the lines. They're setting with the actors up and what they're going to be doing. I'm there to make sure the elements that are in that scene are represented in this blocking right near the beginning. So sometimes that's say it says these two people hug at the end. And I'm not seeing that in the blocking or anything. So I mention it to the director, you know, did you want them to hug? And they can decide, yes, we do want them to hug or maybe not. Maybe we've decided that it's not necessary. Okay, great. So that's the kind of things I would bring up, early on, so people are aware, sort of anything that is screen direction.

CB: And blocking, sorry, just for anyone listening to that doesn't know, blocking is not really rehearsal, but it is going through the scene with just you and the director and the actors to just map it out.

LC: Yes, that's exactly it. Yeah, we're just going to look at this is the set. We know what we have to say. Let's figure out where we should sort of move around in this space. So then we would have an open blocking. That means all the department heads will come in and watch it. I will go over the shots for the scene with the director. Sometimes I get a shot list from the director,

which I keep a close eye on, make sure we get all those pieces that they want. And I'll talk to the AD with that as well. I'll convey any deviation from the script to the director. Sometimes we'll look over storyboards, maybe it's an action sequence, that's mapped out quite specifically so we'll go through that and make sure we know what sort of elements are needed, and what order we're going to shoot those in. And then during the lighting set up when they're getting that set ready, I just get all my notes prepped, I tell the camera and the sound departments what roles they're on, what's going to be on the slate. That's another thing that we're sort of in charge of is what to put on the slate. So while shooting, I usually try to be as close to the action as possible and as close to the director as possible. So it really depends where we're sort of set up. If the director is right on set, I'll be right on set. I think as a script supervisor, you should be flexible with that.

So we're there, so we time every take, so this is used to compare with my estimate that I did in my preproduction so it's a good idea to see how close we are to what I thought the timing was. Maybe we were a little over, maybe we were a little under, and so that gives a clue into the writers, maybe they need to adjust some things as we go along. Other departments need to know how long the scene's going. Sometimes I get questions from the dolly grip saying, how long is this scene because I need to push the dolly in for the whole time to make it last the whole scene? So I go, okay, it's about a minute and a half. So we go, okay, so it's going to be a nice, slow, slow push in. So I would say we're the official time keepers on set as well. We log when the first shot was, when lunch is, when the first shot after lunch is, when we wrap, all the timings we do. I'll give actors any lines that they need. I can sometimes cue actors. The ADs do that a lot the time too, but it just depends on how that's set up. I will make notes of the actors' movements, their dialogue, the screen direction, so which way they're looking on camera, which is very important for when we do coverage of the other actors and screen axis. That's something that the camera department and the director is also looking for too, but it's good that we understand screen direction and axis because you do want, again, to create that seamless continuity look of people looking at each other and knowing who's where in the space. And then during the day, I will do the facing pages and line scripts. So I log every single shot. I would write a description of the shot. I would log how many takes we do, the time of each take, and any notes from any department related to each take. What's preferred? What's not? If there were any continuity problems. If the sound wasn't good on this take, if their sleeves were rolled up that take and they should be down, any little thing like that will be on these notes. And I do a line script.

So a line script is a visual representation on the script of every shot. So a straight line means it's on camera and a squiggly line means it's off camera. And it's a really interesting looking document. It looks quite strange for people who've never seen one before. But it's a really quick way for an editor to see where the footage is and what shots and what coverage is where. So it is a very useful document.

CB: And then what do you do at the end of your day?

LC: So I have a form that is called a daily production report or a progress report or a top sheet, however you'd like to call it. And that really is the totals of everything that we shot that day. It will list every scene that we shot. My estimate running times, the times I got on set as well, the differences between those, the camera rolls, the sound rolls, and any sort of other notes specific to the day. Maybe we've got revisions that day.

CB: So this happens after the cameras stop rolling. Yes. Your job continues. It certainly does. Yes. Yes.

LC: I have homework. Yes. So, I mean, I make sure I go through my notes for the whole day. I reread them, make sure they make sense, and that I've got everything I need on there, do all the totals. And then I send it to post-production and to the office.

CB: I think my brain just got bigger listening to all of those details. It's such a complicated process, but you, you clearly have honed your skills, and it feels like it's instinctual.

LC: It definitely becomes instinctual, yes. It can be very overwhelming at the beginning. I remember, you know, you're watching everything and you're like, well, all sorts of little things are different. The person's necklace moved when they leaned over and now it's sort of sitting a bit differently. Their hair is, you is slightly off or something, you know, it happens all the time. Luckily, there are other departments also looking at that too. And it really is a team effort. And things will happen. As I said, the top two for me, dialogue, I just want to make sure the dialogue makes sense. And it's within the theme and the realm of the story that we're telling. And their active movements. I want to try and match those as seamlessly as possible so you can cut it together. And when it comes to costumes, when it comes to hair, those departments are looking at the continuity as well, and they know to reset them the way that had them at the beginning and then we'll see what happens during the take. So you can't control everything and you don't want to control everything! You want it to happen as naturally as possible, and you want to give a safe space for the actors to create their characters and to come to life and bring the director's vision.

HB: It's almost like you're the bridge between two realities and trying to smooth that transition from real life to this real world that we're trying to create in a seamless, kind of immersive way. But you're kind of the flex between the two to get them there.

LC: Yeah, absolutely. You know, sometimes there's times when you do need to go again, and we need to do it again because it doesn't quite work, there isn't anything else to cut to, and we need to do another shot too to maybe cover some continuity issues that aren't going to work there... and ultimately we want to tell the best story we can. And it's impossible to get 100 percent continuity, because you're not doing it at the same time, you're doing the same thing over and over again, there's always going to be subtle differences. And that's ok, it really is ok, you know you've got to make sure you get the shots you need to cut it together, and sometimes you know there's ways you can do that by just getting certain pieces of coverage that maybe are a little tighter on someone so maybe if they are eating a dinner at a dinner table and things are looking a bit different on the plates as takes and takes go on, maybe we can just go a little tighter and then we won't see that any more. Or, we shoot other angles, umm, so there's other things to cut to, and yeah, you know, there's lots of ways to help with continuity. Yeah.

CB: I just want to bring it back to communications for just a second here because not everyone's going to have a degree in communications. Obviously, that helps you tremendously with your work. For example, if you're in a scenario where you get a shot list from a director that's, you know, three days long and you have half a day to shoot it. Have you ever been in that situation? How do you communicate that to the person it is whose vision everyone's trying to bring to life?

LC: Well luckily there's other departments too that probably also got this shot list that look at it and thought it's maybe a bit unrealistic in the time frame that we have to do this, so I think there will be discussions with the Assistant Director and the DP on what we can realistically shoot. But you know what happens too is when you start shooting, you find that maybe some of those shots are incorporated in that one shot. So sometimes someone's shot list might be very long, but it's actually some of those lines really are all covered in maybe one shot. So there's ways to cover the elements that they want in fewer shots, that is definitely a way to suggest it to a director. And then, you know, after a while, when you sort of get into the scene, you've done a few setups, you know, you can see what you really need here. Do we need this insert? Maybe we don't. Maybe we saw it enough in this medium shot.

CB: And an insert shot, is something you'd cut away to from the actors, like a pen or a book or something.

LC: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Maybe it's a little bit more information about something. Maybe we don't need to see it. You know, these days sometimes, like if it's a phone, maybe you can just, someone's doing a text message or something, you can just shoot them front on seeing them with the phone and you can maybe pop up the text next to them. However, they've wanted to shoot that. There's a variety of ways of how you can convey that without having to do an insert. But it's the director's call on that for sure.

HB: So we're used to hearing people talk about the pressure that they have in their job role across these interviews that we've been doing. But it sounds like you're sort of everyone's insurance policy. They've all got jobs to do, but you're the backup. How do you deal with that kind of pressure when you're at work?

LC: You know, you're only as good as your team with you. I think it really is a team effort. I am kind of a final check in a lot of, uh, areas. But I feel like if, you know, if the props and the costumes and the hair and makeup are all over their department and their set, then it's great. Then they really are prepared. I just have a quick little look saying, yeah, it looks like they should be wearing that. That's how they had their hair last time. Okay, great. And, and then we're good to go.

CB: You've worked on some pretty incredible shows. And so like, what's left for you? What do you see? What do you see in the future? Is there anyone you'd like to work.

LC: Oh yeah, all sorts, I mean, who doesn't want to do a Star Wars movie?! I really love sci fi actually, I just think it's great, it's a whole fun fantasy realm that is just fun. I think just any great story that really interests you would just be fun to work on. Yeah, I love all sorts of directors, too, like a Wes Anderson style, very particular, quirky. Yeah, there's lots of things I'd like to do. I'd like to do some more movies. I've definitely done a lot of episodic television, and that's great. I really enjoy the stories as a whole and how the characters change and the big arcs of the story, which you can delve into in episodic television. But there's something magical about doing a really fun movie as well. Stunt sequences are really fun sometimes. They're quite hard to keep track of. They usually move very, very fast. You shoot them fast. Just telling good stories. I think if you're interested in stories, then I think it being a script supervisor is a good job for that.

HB: So if you could summarize your department in a sentence, what would it be?

LC: Geez, I have to think about that one.

HB: Or have you had a motto for your department?

LC: Oh, motto. We see everything. Yeah, we really do. We see it all and we hear it all.

CB: So you really want to be friends with the script supervisor.

LC: Yes, why not? And we want to be friends with the other departments too, because they really help us out too. It's team effort there, for sure.

CB: And how do you maintain your work life balance? What does your rest period look like? What is the cyclical work life for you?

LC: Yeah, honestly, it can be very difficult if you're full time on a show. You know, you could be doing a lot of your breakdowns, your script breakdowns, your timings, revisions and things on the weekends. I mean, that's ultimately when you have time to do it. I am lucky that I alternate on a scripted series, so I do every second episode and another script supervisor does the other episodes. And I find that just gives me the time to prep efficiently and some time in between, which is really great. I love the opportunity to be able to do that. I think also there are times that a script supervisor assistant is also warranted. There are some really big shows these days, and the shows are getting more complicated visually, with visual effects, with stunts, with sort of big days with lots of cameras and it can be very hard to keep track of all that. I think the bigger the show here, the more elements of the show there are, you can get an assistant, that is actually an option, which is nice.

CB: So do you have a preference between a feature film or television and just what are the basic differences between the two?

LC: Well, I think the story is just bigger in a film ultimately. That's really it. I mean, it depends on what's in the story. I mean, sometimes, you know, you could do a feature film and it's really just about a relationship and it's just maybe two people and they're talking around. And then you could be doing a major sci-fi visual effects stunt TV series with multiple elements, multiple units that you have to keep track of. And so it just depends. Some are much bigger workload than others for sure, but you still have to keep track of everything. So that doesn't change.

CB: Well, thank you, Laura, for coming in today. I appreciate, and I know our listeners will appreciate all of the detailed information that you've given us, we would expect nothing less from a script supervisor. So thank you so much for the chat.

LC: Oh, thank you for having me.

HB: Thank you so much, I really appreciate that everything you've told us sort of speaks against the stereotypes of, "oh you have to only be creative," there's such a balance of what you do, between creativity, and organization, and administrative and communication skills, that people I think take for granted sometimes, in the communications field.

LC: Yeah, you're right. And it does encompass all those things. It really is. You're still a creative member of this film community. And that's what I really love about it, too. You know, you build such strong relationships with your actors and directors too, and they can really value your input. And you really are a valued member and an essential member of a film set. And every department relies on you. So, if you like being in the middle of things. It's a good job.

HB: Awesome. Thank you so much.

CB: Thanks, Laura.

HB: And that's a wrap for another episode of Apple Box Talks.

CB: For more episodes and to find your fit in the film and TV industry, check out www.ourwork.ca

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