

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Pamela Adlon, *Better Things*

Elisa Leonelli · Wednesday, May 1st, 2019

I love to watch the comedy series *Better Things* on FX, currently on its third season and already renewed for a fourth. I marvel at the originality and authenticity of the situations depicted in each episode—they resonate with me as a mother. The show is created by showrunner Pamela Adlon, based on her own life. She plays Sam Fox, an actress like herself, the divorced mother of three young daughters, Duke, Frankie and Max, dealing with humorous and heartbreaking issues, including taking care of her elderly mother, Phil, who lives next door.



Mikey Madison as Max, Pamela Adlon as Sam Fox, Olivia Edward as Duke, Hannah Allgood as Frankie, Celia Imre as Phil. (c) Pamela Littky/FX

Adlon casts all the actors, she directs every episode. For the first two years, her only writing partner was comedian Louis C.K., who lost his production deal with FX in late 2018 after admitting that he likes to masturbate in front of women. Adlon was upset, so she took some time off, then hired other writers to assist her. But all the material is inspired by her life, by what happened to her, to her daughters, to their friends, and to her English mother, who does live next door to her in real life.



Pamela Adlon as Sam Fox. (c) Suzanne Tenner/FX

I interviewed Pamela Adlon twice and she's a firecracker, incredibly funny and genuine. She said, "FX let me make a very handmade show, literally down to the art on the walls. Every day I bring giant garbage bags filled with clothes from my house to put on the girls acting as my daughters. I'm wearing my own stuff. It's about my life, but not everything is what's happening to me. It's not a reality show, it's very scripted.

"I had to shed layers of being self-conscious, which can be very crippling. You can't be self-conscious about your life, your parenting, your looks, how you're aging, how you're changing. You just have to take it on in a healthy way.

"I have my own show, I have six different jobs that I do, I hire people, I employ people, I'm making art. My life has changed exponentially because of this show. It's not just another job for me, it has completely cracked open my whole life.

"Although I love dark humor so much, you have to come out of it somehow, it can't be nihilistic.

After the first season aired, people were looking at the show as something that was giving them hope and that powerful feeling of love.”



Pamela Adlon as Sam Fox, Mikey Madison as Max (c) Jessica Brooks/FX

There are so many gems in the 36 episodes of the 3 seasons, that it’s impossible to mention them all. The one that I found most intriguing in season 3 is episode 3 titled “Nesting” where Sam Fox (Pamela Adlon) is cooking lemon risotto at home for a group of her friends (Sharon Stone plays one of the guests). Sam’s manager Tressa (Rebecca Metz) warns her client and friend about a sexy younger woman, Mer (Marsha Thomason), a talent agent, saying, “She’s dangerous, she’s a flipper of straight women.” Sam’s middle daughter Frankie (Hannah Alligood) peeks into the door and comments, “You guys are so binary!” The personal and professional flirtation between the “straight” Sam and the “lesbian” Mer continues in episode 4 “Monsters in the Moonlight” and 9 “The Unknown.”



Hannah Alligood as Frankie (c) Pamela Littky/FX

Adlon explains, “It was important to me to have the middle daughter be androgynous and not making any kind of a comment on her. When I was growing up, they always called me a tomboy, I was not a feminine girl and I did not feel comfortable in that world. Then I went through a phase, when I was 15, where everybody thought I was a guy; so I explored that as a young woman, I was able to live in both worlds. My real life middle daughter went through a phase like that for four years. She didn’t want anyone to make any comment about her gender, she used a genderless name, and the way she dressed, she did not look like a sexy girl or a cute tomboy, but just like a boy, wearing clothes from Target’s boy department, but still wearing pink crocs. So that’s something that’s a part of our lives, and it was massively important to me to have a character like that in the show, who’s living that reality. My kids and their friends think we are all ridiculous because we are so hung up on gender and being binary. That’s the world that my kids live in and I hope we are all moving towards. It doesn’t have to be black and white.”

There are so many contemporary issues of daily family life that a multi-layered, honest and compassionate show like *Better Things* touches on, that you will find your cup of tea in there, something that moves you and compels you to reflect. It will also make you laugh...

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