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Applebee's

I can honestly say that I have rarely seen scripts that are so unique, so well-developed, and so full of potential for bringing Applebee's a look and feel that is entertaining and engaging enough to separate it from all others in the category. So, my compliments for the great work you've put into this. Granted, the campaigns are quite different. But the quality of the writing and the understated and wonderfully ironic tone of the humor insists on them being treated with an approach that combines great casting and performances with a look that grounds these moments in their own particular cinematic reality.

The Carside spots call for a look and feel that is filmic. *It's All Coming Back*, takes us into a romantic parody that demands to be executed with a tongue-in-cheek authenticity that borrows shamelessly from the overwrought sentimentality of the original music video that inspired it. While *Choir* is all about taking an epic film approach that allows you to announce the return of these legendary and longed-for Riblets with a resounding anthemic chorus of voices that will literally reverberate in the rafters. It's not about trying to impose a one-size-fits-all look on the spots. Each demands a level of attention all their own, and what follows are some thoughts on how I would give each of them their understated comic due.

The Food

Regardless of the type of story being told, we'll never lose sight of the fact that the food needs to get the hero treatment. Because of this, we'll want to integrate the Applebee's To Go bags and menu items, the Riblets, and the Tenders, into these scenes while filming and lighting them in ways that dial up their deliciousness and appetite appeal. Since this is so important, I'll plan to work with a DP who has a beautifully real food and live action aesthetic. The goal will be to make sure that the food moments feel organic to the live action, while at the same time having a perfectly imperfect bite-the-screen crave-ability.

Applebee's "Carside To Go"

These spots impress me as the types of stories that call for a look that grounds them in a cinematic reality. We'll be putting the camera in motion at times to help bring a little organic motion to the scenes. In addition to that, the angles and perspectives, lensing, and lighting will all be designed to advance the story and bring the spots a look and feel that is filmic, naturalistic, and real.

As a way of adding to this realistic look and feel, we'll cast actors who are likable, approachable, and relatable. In terms of their looks, we'll want to avoid obvious TV commercial types. Physical appearance aside, it's also critical to search for actors who can add some personality to these roles — while still delivering grounded performances. They need to have the talent to get the tone of the humor — and play it with just enough of a subtle wink to bring the right amount of irony to the spots.

In addition to that, we'll want to find performers with those endearing flaws that make them watchable and unique. Actors like Judy Greer, Leslie Mann, Emily Blunt, Ty Burrell, Sam Jaeger, or Tom Everett Scott come to mind. The idea is to find people who look real, and who can also bring the spots some depth and dimension of character. There's no need for them to play comedy. They simply need to respond to the lyrics in the song by personalizing them, and the more real they play those moments (without the slightest hint of irony), the funnier and more charming these will be.

When we get beyond those casting and performance details, the other key is to find a way to start these stories while integrating the shot of these people using the Applebee's phone app to order without giving too much away.

As a way of making this feel a bit more natural, I would put these people in motion. We can track along with them as they exit the building where they work, move across a parking garage, or driveway outside their home toward their car. Capturing them from a side angle or in front of them, we see that they have their mobile phones in hand.

Punching in to a close up we reveal that they have the Applebee's App open and are selecting some items for pickup. Rather than feeling static, this will help give the scenes a little energy — while providing us with a transitional device that is literally and figuratively transportive.

The moment we see that app being used, we cue the music, cut away to the shots of the food, and when we come out of that portion of the story — we see our characters parked outside an Applebee's — just as the server is exiting the restaurant with their orders.

For the sake of instilling the spots with a little visual variety, we could even have one of them happening while it's raining ("Drive"). This would reinforce the convenience of using the app by seeing the server come out carrying the branded bags while holding an umbrella over his head. It's just a thought, but it could add a hint of visual interest.

Obviously, the music plays an important role in the storytelling, and I think we can use it to add to the ironic tone by actually having our characters aware of the lyrics the audience is hearing — and then responding to them as they pick up their food. It's like one of those moments when the lyric of a song you're listening to works in perfect symmetry to the moment you're experiencing — and in this case that has to do with picking up Applebee's for dinner.

Once they've picked the food up, we'll cut to reveal the different reasons for deciding to eat in. Our woman wants to slip into comfy sweats, plop down on the sofa with her husband, and finish binging on a show the two of them have been watching.

Our young dad has planned a meal with the family, and when he arrives with the Applebee's bags, he gets a hero's welcome — but he knows it's more for the food than him. The moment he sets the bags down, everyone pulls up to the table. Conversations start. The kids are happy. Mom is thrilled not to have to cook. And there's a feeling that this is kind of a special night that they all get to enjoy at home — without a lot of fuss.

The guy we see picking up the food for guys' night could arrive at a house where some of his friends are settling in to watch a game. It could also be a poker night situation, and he could set the bags down on a card table amidst the poker chips and cards, so that they can all dig in as that first hand is dealt.

Since the back ends of these three spots are all set in the interior of homes, it will also be a good idea to search for one location that can be used for all three spots. A home with a nice kitchen, living room, dining room, and entertainment room would work well. It's a home with an inviting, lived-in quality — a place where you'd love to hang out with friends, share time with the family, or just snuggle in for dinner in front of the TV.

Applebee's "It's All Coming Back"

If there is a downside to this spot, which there isn't, but if there was — it would be that we only get to play it out as a :30, instead of a full six minute and three second parody. The concept is brilliant. The potential for comedy is... endless. I only wish we could do a frame-by-frame send up. But as it is, we do have 30 seconds of ironic comedy to play with, and I want to make the most of each and every moment of film.

To do that, I think it's absolutely essential that we go into this with the idea of letting the story evolve. We want to brainstorm on ideas, pull out all the stops, and exploit all the devices and conventions of the original that we can.

That begins with taking an approach to the film that has an overly romantic, gauzy, softness, complete with cross-fades, and a gently floating camera that feels as if it's drifting along in the same dreamily lyrical way as the music.

We can add to that by casting a ruggedly handsome guy in his early 40s who has just the right amount of beard scruffiness on his face. The woman should be an actress who can really commit herself to the comedy. Someone like Kristin Wiig, Kate McKinnon, or Tina Fey who understands the ironic tone, and who can set shame aside and just really dig into this character — and these ribs — can really help deliver the level of comic potential this story holds.

As far as the story itself — this all about creating a juxtaposition between this long-lost ballad and these people chowing down on the Riblets and Tenders. But before launching into this 90s music video style of filmmaking, we'll open on our couple sitting at a table in an Applebee's with plates of Riblets and Tenders resting in front of them.

There's an inexplicable awkwardness in their mood. It's as if they are reflecting on something that has a deep emotional significance, which oddly enough, is all centered on the Riblets and Tenders. Milking the moment for all we can, we should take a moment to see the two of them glance down at the plates — before looking back up to gaze into each other's eyes.

A beat later, the woman reaches for a Riblet. The camera glides along with her hand, and just as she touches it — the first notes of Celine Dion's "It's All Coming Back to Me Now" begin to play.

We instantly shift from the cinematic reality into the soft filtered look of the music video. Time slows. Every movement plays out as if released by a longing sigh. In contrast to that, there shouldn't be anything at all delicate about the way they're eating these Riblets and Tenders. They are digging in and savoring every saucy, meaty, bite.

As we discussed on the call, there's also the matter of the flashback to consider. We could certainly use wardrobe, hairstyling, and makeup to create a moment from the 90s in which we see this same couple chowing down. In post, we could treat it differently to appear as if it's rising from their memories. But this is one of the things that we should continue to discuss as we move ahead.

There's also the possibility of integrating a convention that you always see in videos like these — which is the cut to the framed photo of the lovers. In this case, since we're in an Applebee's maybe we could integrate that by seeing the woman lift her iPhone up to gaze at a picture taken 10 years ago. Instead of being a shot of the two of them — it might just her, holding a plate of Riblets up to her face or taking a big bite of one with sauce smeared all over her mouth.

If we wanted to push it even further — since the glass in those framed pictures always ends up cracked — we could even consider having the screen of her iPhone slightly shattered. But again — that's one of the details that we can continue to mull over.

In addition to romantic close ups that glide over and around the Riblets resting on a plate, and the Tenders being dipped into sauce, other moments that we simply can't do without will involve slow motion shots of her blinking her eyes, the man's hand reaching over to gracefully sweep the woman's hair away from her face, a moment in which they're feeding each other (messily) in slow motion. We might also see the man point to his face and then cut to the reverse to see a smear of sauce on the woman's face — which she licks away with her tongue.

Another scene that just begs for parody is the lost-lover's-image-appearing-in-the-mirror moment. Since this deal involves all you can eat, maybe we could adapt that to this story by shooting over the woman's shoulder to see the reflection of a server in a window or mirror — just as he's reaching around her to set another plate of Riblets down on the table.

Once we're into the heart of this story, we'll also have to create a moment in which the camera revolves around the table as the two of them tear into these Riblets, dip the Tenders into sauce, and continuing to feed each other across the table.

Although we didn't discuss it, there's also the possibility of adding one extra comic beat to the end of the spot. That could involve bringing the song to an end and suddenly returning to reality to see these two people sprawled out in the booth — absolutely exhausted from the sensory overload of having indulged in all this food.

The waiter could arrive at the table, look down at them, and then after an awkward beat, simply says, "Uh... dessert...?" And we cut away to the end card.

Applebee's "Choir"

Before I get into the particulars of this spot, I have to start by telling you how much I enjoyed our call. The concept for this is beyond exciting. As I mentioned during our discussion, it feels big on the page, and my ultimate goal is to design an approach that would bring it to life in a way that makes this look, feel, and play even bigger.

Adding visual flourishes that can come from the location, wardrobe, camera work, and the performances will help bring this a level of spine-tingling power and magic. That's what I think will make it visually arresting and entertaining — and ultimately — very funny and memorable. So... Where do we begin?

The Choir & Venue

A good deal of what we do in terms of the tone of this spot will depend on the location and the type of choir we decide to cast. As we discussed, there are two options. One would involve assembling a good cross-section of real people who have a sort of Middle American look, who we would have lip synch to the playback of an actual choir.

There is comic value in that, but my sense is that the humor you've captured in the boards comes from this *O Fortuna* inspired song being performed in a stunning venue by an actual choir. There's more of an ironic juxtaposition in that, and while we'll continue to stay open to both, working with a proper choir feels like it will provide the gravitas that this spot really demands.

Either way, during the filming, I'm more than certain that we'll have some breakout personalities emerge, which will give us opportunities to capture some moments of them performing.

This might involve arranging a solo moment, or part of the song being performed by a section of the choir. We could also use the camera to happen upon one of the singers putting on an Applebee's bib. Depending on how far we want to push this, we could even work in some moments with the Choral Director by cutting to him for a quick shot in which we see him holding a Tender in his hand instead of a baton. Or, he could reach off to grab a Riblet and take a bite while conducting the choir.

In terms of the location, I would love to take this to the limit by shooting in a place that has a classic Baroque or Victorian architectural look. The ballroom or grand hall of a castle, a cathedral, an old train station, or an opera house would provide us with the sort of ornate splendor that can create a great ironic contrast to the lyrics being sung.

I also love the idea of creating an Applebee's themed wardrobe for the choir. Seeing half the choir robed in Riblet Maroon, and half wearing Tender Gold robes can add a hint of subtle visual humor and branding to the moments — while also feeling true to the concept.

An Epic Look & Feel

Visually, this insists on being treated with a photographic approach that adds to the feeling of grandeur. To that end, I would approach it with the idea of using a mix of pans, dolly moves, boom ups, tilt downs, and other fluid photographic moves that create a nice editorial build. We'll design expansive wide shots that capture the beauty of the location and the breadth and size of this choir, while balancing those with a blend of mediums and close ups that help add some emotion to the scenes.

I'm also a big believer in getting great coverage, and for a spot like this, I would go in with the intention of providing you with more than enough footage for a :60 — because in the end I think you may want it. Even if you don't decide to air it in that length, you might consider giving it an online presence — because I really believe this is the type of spot that is sharable enough to have a viral life all its own.

Those details aside, I envision opening this with a slow dolly move that glides elegantly in toward the choir. As we get closer we'll begin to create a visual and editorial build that becomes steadily grander and more epic.

As mentioned, if we decide to incorporate the “endless” table into this segment, we could even have the camera glide over the length of this long table covered with plates of Riblets and Tenders as we get progressively closer and closer to the choir. The idea being that we'd cross-cut between the table, the food footage and the choir, building in

intensity until we boom/tilt up from the table to see the choir singing full-blown praise of the food set before them on the table.

After we've covered this amazing performance that sends chills down your spine, we might even want to bring it to an end by seeing the two halves of the choir split and exit in opposite directions toward the long table.

The procession of the Riblets and Tenders clad choir members would file down along both sides of the table — before sitting down to this glorious Applebee's feast, as the camera pulls up and away to close on a shot that has an epic visual and comic appeal.

Summing things up...

These are some of the thoughts I have right now, which will continue to become more defined as we collaborate and move ahead. That said — the scripts are all great. They read incredibly well on the page. My goal is to help you bring them to life by combining great casting and performances with a photographic approach that uses deliciously real looks at the food to accentuate the irony of the stories.

Embracing those juxtapositions of irresistibly appetizing food imagery, and tongue-in-cheek humor, will allow the comic irony to rise naturally from the concept — ultimately offering you three great campaigns that people will enjoy watching time and time again.

Thanks again for sending these my way, and I look forward to speaking with all of you further.