

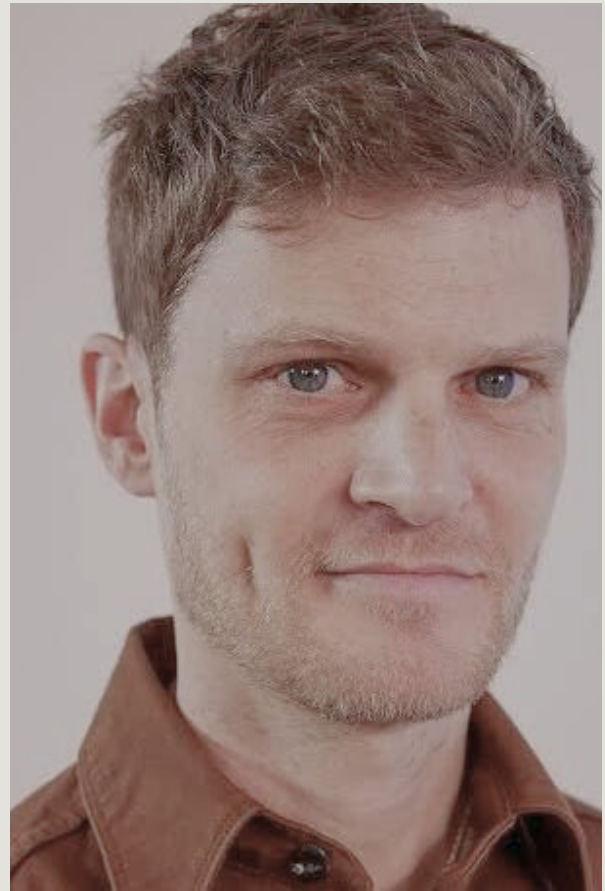
DAVID JOSEPH CRAIG ON TEAMWORK IN THE FILM INDUSTRY

I Don't Understand You (2024) is a horror-comedy film that follows a couple on a beautiful Italian vacation gone wrong. According to screenwriter and director David Joseph Craig, about the first twenty minutes of film were "directly stolen" from his own experience travelling and adopting a child with his husband, Brian Crano, who co-wrote and directed the film alongside Craig. Craig also co-produced and acted in *Boy Erased* (2018), a film based on a memoir by Garrard Conley, a professor at Kennesaw State University, who befriended Craig during production and was kind enough to help me get in touch with him. Craig and I met over Zoom on November 11, 2025 to discuss getting involved with filmmaking along with his personal creative process.

Early Life and Education

Craig was raised in Ohio and describes his youth there as "non-transformational." During his youth he participated in regional theatre, which he enjoyed more for the people surrounding him than anything else. Craig elaborated, "I just liked the people there because they didn't make me feel judged. . . And I think that's what made me realize I wanted to be in some sort of creative field." The connections and inspiration Craig found in theatre wound up motivating his later move to New York, where he attended NYU for a year before he wound up getting a BFA in Theatre Arts from Marymount Manhattan College. When I asked how his education in theatre impacted his career, he laughed and claimed the degree itself has not been particularly helpful to his career in filmmaking but emphasized that his education in New York brought him to the people he now has in his life: "the weirdos and artists".

"THE WEIRDOS AND ARTISTS"



Getting Into Film

After college, Craig found himself doing some commercial acting, and some haphazard sketch work and writing in New York. He even auditioned for Saturday Night Live a couple of times. During his early work, Craig found that he was unhappy as an actor. He shared, "As an actor it's really hard to have any sort of creative control over anything because you're just kind of being told where to go and what to do." After this bit of self-revelation, Craig wanted to pursue more behind-the-scenes work, and a friend of his, a producer, told him about a group of Australian filmmakers coming to America to break into the Hollywood world. Through this connection, Craig was able to begin working with Joel Edgerton, an actor and director. Craig started out as Edgerton's assistant, but eventually became his producing partner.

In total, Craig and Edgerton worked closely together for twelve years, and Craig considers this work to have been his own sort of film school and solidified his desire to be “the driving force behind the camera rather than in front of it.”

Sharing the Creativity

This theme of working with a partner is something that continues throughout Craig’s career. Like I mentioned before, he wrote and directed *I Don’t Understand You* with his husband, Brian Crano, and, since that film’s release (about a year and a half ago as of writing this article), the pair has written six more feature film scripts—not counting projects they have worked on apart from one another!



This feat alone speaks to how well the couple works together creatively, and Craig claimed, “We luckily have a very similar sense of humor, and we also have a very similar sense of story. Where we differ, that is actually really helpful, is that Brian is very quick and is not precious, so he could write fifteen pages and if none of them work out he’s fine throwing them away, whereas I’m very methodical. I need to think through the next three scenes before I’m able to write.” Craig and Crano’s different approaches to writing serve as a

great balance for one another, where Crano is able to keep the process moving and keep Craig out of his head, and Craig is able to make sense of and structure all of Crano’s ideas.

Exploding Inspiration

I Don’t Understand You was a film that came from a very personal place for Craig and Crano. The idea for this film was born when, on a romantic trip to Italy, Craig and Crano found themselves lost with their car stuck in the mud, and they thought: this would make a good horror movie. Of course, the later events of the film are not based in reality, but this experience served as the seed for the plot. Craig explained, “My brain always goes from a kernel of an idea to then going ‘how can I explode this to the craziest moment.’” Craig also said that he never writes a story he knows the ending of: “If I had an end in mind, I would limit myself in the in-between.” Craig’s process of writing is very different than the structural approach to story that is usually taught to creative writing students, and his unintentional advice actually motivated me to finish a writing project I’ve been stuck on for over a month now!

“HOW CAN I EXPLODE THIS TO THE CRAZIEST MOMENT?”

Once a script is written, it takes teams upon teams of people to actually get that movie made, and it starts with funding. Different types of scripts take different approaches to getting sold. For *I Don’t Understand You*, Craig and Crano worked with a producer they were already familiar with and wanted to get actors attached to the script before they attempted to sell the script. Craig explained that, for comedies, studios often want to see the talent that will be bringing the comedy to life, and actors bring in funding for the movie. Craig and Crano also had the experience of serving as writers and directors on *I Don’t Understand You*, which

gave them a lot of control over the outcome of the movie, but that is not standard for screenwriters in Hollywood. Craig said, "Once its in a director's hands, its in a director's hands." Because of this, Craig tends to go for writer/director roles, but that isn't always possible. With more genre-specific films, like horror films, studios tend to have a formula for production; they want to buy the script and apply their formula to it.

Final Thoughts

My conversation with Craig was very informative and more personally helpful than I could have ever imagined. I have to admit that I was quite nervous for this interview, but Craig was very kind and funny, which helped me feel a lot more relaxed. Going forward in my creative life, I will certainly keep in mind a lot of what Craig had to say about working with the right people, surprising yourself, and trusting yourself and those around you. I also have a new, much more clear, perspective on the process of screenwriting and filmmaking, and the whole industry feels much less daunting.