

Transcript

Madeleine

Welcome to Practise Makes: The Oxford Re-Imagining Performance Podcast, where we put leading scholars in conversation with actors, directors and other practitioners to crack open the connections between feeder research and performance in practise. I'm Madeleine Saidenberg.

Helen

And I'm Helen Dallas, and we're PhD students at Oxford.

Madeleine

We've worked in theatre as directors and dramaturgs.

HELEN

And now we also ask academic questions about theatre.

MADELEINE

In this episode we speak with Hannah Green Street and Frank Kwa Hawking about multi hyphenate careers.

Hannah Greenstreet is an academic playwright and theatre critic. Hannah was awarded her doctorate from the University of Oxford last year for her thesis "Experiments with Realism and Contemporary Feminist Theatre in Britain," for which she jointly won the Swapna Dev Memorial Book Prize for the best thesis in the Faculty of English. She is a lecturer in creative writing for stage and screen at the University of Liverpool. As a playwright, Hannah centres on women's narratives and queer experiences. Her queer re-imagining of Euripides is *Andromeda*, a fragmentary tragedy was performed at Camden People's Theatre. This playwriting has been developed with Spread the Word, Oval House's adult company, Soho writers lab, the North Wall Art Centre's Theatre Craft Residency, and Menagerie Theatre's Young Writers Workshop. Hannah is also the Co-editor for Exeunt magazine, which is at the time of this recording on hiatus. She has reviewed regularly for Exeunt and The Stage, and was the critic in residence at the Alchemy Festival 2019 at the North Wall Arts Centre.

HELEN

Frey Kwa Hawking is a dramaturg, critic, and writer. He has written for a Younger Theatre, Exeunt, and The Stage. He describes himself as quite trans and angry. Frey was dramaturg assistant on the Young Vic's Neighbourhood Voices Programme, and has been a part of the Royal Court script panel. He is passionate about new writing. Frey has worked on shows performed at Nottingham Playhouse, Bunker Theatre, Greenwich Theatre and Camden People's Theatre, including being the dramaturg for *Andromeda*.

Oh, we are so delighted to have you both here.

MADELEINE

Welcome, thank you so much for being here with us.

FREY

Thank you for having us.

HANNAH

Weird to hear us introduced in that way.

I put all of that information on my website. (laughs)

HELEN

All of that information is on your website! How do you think I found it? (laughs) I feel like those introductions have slightly suggested this, but uhm, we'd love to hear about where you both met, how you know one another, how you started working together.

HANNAH

Yeah, we were trying to work this out actually, but I think we met kind of in the digital space by both writing criticism for Exeunt magazine and I think we probably encountered each other at press nights and then from both admiring each other's criticism work? Uh, I knew that Frey was a dramaturg and we sort of came to a point with *Andromeda*, in my play, where we thought a dramaturg would be really helpful. And so I reached out to Frey and we had a coffee.

FREY

Yes, that is also how I remember it as well. Yes, I think we got to properly know each other when we were working on *Andromeda*, but I had admired Hannah's criticism and also nice editing for a very long time. And if anyone looking to read some of Hannah's criticism in Exeunt, which is probably quite different in interesting ways from her, like, academic writing, I was re-reading some yesterday and would point you towards her *Anatomy of a Suicide Redux* review, which is interesting because I know that you wrote about *Anatomy of a Suicide* in your PhD, one of your case studies Hannah, and also her review of *When We Have Sufficiently Tortured Each Other* at the National. Both pretty amazing pieces of criticism.

HANNAH

Oh, thank you. Now I feel bad that I haven't looked up yours Frey, but I would—

FREY

No, I thought I'd surprise you, but also just happened by accident and then I was like, these are really good, should mention these in case anyone's interested.

HELEN

That's brilliant. Thank you.

MADELEINE

I know you mentioned working on *Andromeda* together, and I wonder if you could just introduce a little bit about what *Andromeda* was and what the process of working together was like on that.

HANNAH

Sure, uhm so *Andromeda*. I say it's a queer re-imagining of Euripides. A play which only exists in fragments. *Andromeda*. So it's about Perseus, this hero saving Andromeda, who's about to be eaten by sea monster, from her fate. And but the interesting thing about Euripides' tragedy was that we

think it was far more concerned with the kind of, Perseus wants to get married to Andromeda, but her family is not on board with that because they're from different cultural backgrounds and we think the tragedy was far more about that, but it's lost. And so Charlotte Vickers, the director of *Andromeda*, originally came to me with the idea, saying "I would like to do a queer adaptation of *Andromeda*" and, again, we met through Twitter. I think we probably-- just because it's The Edinburgh Fringe at the moment, I think we met in the Summerhall kind of courtyard. And and got got chatting from there. I guess it's quite tricky to adapt a, uh, the only existing fragments. There's a lot of reimagining. So what we've done is tried to take bits from the myth and splice it with a contemporary queer relationship between Percy and Andy, who are two young women at university. Andy's just sort of figuring out her sexuality and it's sort of the two narrative strands run in parallel: the myth, and then Percy and Andy, and they, sort of interweave together, I don't know whether I'm explaining this the right way. Frey, do you have any...?

Speaker 5

I recognise what you're saying as the play that we worked on, so I feel like you've done a good job. Uhm yeah, Hannah does a really great and interesting job of balancing the like slightly more grounded and recognisable in-our-time story of Andy and Percy's first love together and the meta-narrative of *Andromeda* and Perseus, and does all kinds of cool things with the ways that the characters, in some ways, jeopardise their relationship by seemingly reading themselves through or onto these characters. But there's all kinds of tensions as to, you know, to what extent they're doing that, and if that's just the way that we're receiving the play, and how conscious it is for the characters that they're doing that, yeah.

HANNAH

And I think we brought Frey into the process about a year or two in so that has been quite a long time. The process, it, so it was performed in July 2021 at Camden People's Theatre—we're hoping it's going to come back at some point, watch this space—and yeah, funding committee...

HELEN

That'd be great.

HANNAH

But it was a long time in development, uhm, partly because COVID sort of scattered our original run, but also just a long time in development before that and I think we sort of came to a crossroads in the script where we were battling with like lots of lots of different difficulties, partly just how to make the two strands of the script work together. I feel like they have a kind of metaphorical poetic relationship with each other, they don't necessarily map directly onto each other, like Percy is not Perseus, but she also reads herself into the character sometimes. Andy's definitely not *Andromeda* her, but she's sometimes cast as *Andromeda* by Percy in their relationship and part of, we came to part of that theatrical language through an original R&D and getting actors to sort of play around with the story with the myth, and then I wrote-- the script has many drafts, but I wrote a draft of the script, and and I think what Frey has been so helpful at doing is helping me work out what the play is, of where I want it to go, and sort of detangling lots of different things in the play. And yeah, it's just been really amazing to work with a dramaturg. I would recommend it for all playwrights if they possibly can. I think it just, it's really helpful to be able to show drafts just to someone else who's who's not the director? Yeah Frey, do you want to say a bit more about what you, what you did?

FREY

I, I think it probably makes more sense to start by talking about the fact that as you mentioned, I was coming into this process later than you and Charlotte, and so you already had been doing a lot of dramaturgical work with each other and alone, like on this play. And so as someone coming into it after that, I think it is often the task of the dramaturg to attempt to make sure that they're understanding what the writer needs, what the director needs, where you meet each other, and where there can be some, like, speaking between you and so on and with *Andromeda* it was lovely because I was, I was both doing sort of script sessions with you and sometimes with Charlotte, so sometimes I'd be sending notes via e-mail to you, and I'd be copying Charlotte in. Or sometimes I wouldn't be. And we would have 3 way script meetings sometimes and we also had a few that would just you and me. And then being in the rehearsal room as well. Uh, but for the version of *Andromeda* was shown at Amplify Festival in Nottingham and then for the run at Camden People's Theatre in 2021 and I was there in the rehearsal room a lot, which makes quite a difference when, for instance, the writer isn't there for all of that time because I think hopefully you remember some of the echoes of what previous iterations of the play have been and can not sort of rigorously defend the writers vision against everything, but to be there as like a reminder, and to help hopefully, synthesise and nudge and tie things together in a way that hopefully altogether aids the cohesion of the total piece. It might be useful for listeners who don't know if I talk about like what a dramaturg is.

HELEN

I was I was just going to say, if you would. Especially, like, what dramaturgy means to you, because I think you know, as you're saying, you're looking at quite specific experiences in *Andromeda*. It can mean a lot of things, so both like a dictionary definition would be fantastic and Frey, you personally.

FREY

Yeah, so I keep notes on like various different definitions of dramaturgy that people have used that I like and there's a lot of them out there, and it is also the question that most dramaturgs like get very very tired of answering because it's quite a formidable word and in this country, we're not quite as used to using it as they are in, say America or in Europe. In this country, dramaturgy tends to be quite script focused, because we are traditionally like a writer's theatre, but anyone involved in working on a play is doing dramaturgy. Dramaturgy is sort of the work of making the theatre, really.. Mark Bly has a really nice definition of dramaturgy where he says that it's like how the nose has two functions, both to breathe and to smell and the mouth has two functions, both to breathe and to taste and that the dramaturg knows at once that, has to embrace the fact that the dramaturg's role could be just seen as redundant because everyone there is doing dramaturgy. The writer is engaged in thinking deeply about how the play is being made and what goes into it, and so is the director, and so is the lighting designer. Also that we can bristle with the possibilities that just having someone there who is explicitly for this as well affords making a thing, and what that changes. And then Tony Hiss said that it's someone who keeps the whole in mind, which is a really simple and lovely way of thinking about it as well. But yeah, in my experience I, I think possibly because of my-- I don't know-- attempted stuffy academic background, like, and lack of physical comfort, I work most with like scripts and with writers and I'm not super, I don't know, physically active or whatever in rehearsal rooms, so I do a lot of script reading and consulting like one-on-one with writers and so on. Yes, yeah, does that work?

HELEN

Yeah, that I was that you can ask, completely off the back of that, uhm, what the relationship between dramaturgy and Hannah for you as well, with the writing with those in research as kind of

the theme of the podcast 'cause, you know, those wonderful examples that you're saying, feel like they speak to research but also not directly about research. And I'd love to hear more about that.

HANNAH

I feel like when artists and academics talk about research, they mean different things. We were funded for like periods of research and development, but that doesn't necessarily mean you're sitting in the library. It means you're in a rehearsal room with actors exploring a script, maybe improvising around the script, seeing how the work works on its feet. We also, because *Andromeda* is based on an ancient Greek play, we also did some kind of research in a more traditional academic sense. So Martina Astrid Rodar who finished their DPhil recently in classics at Oxford was our kind of classical consultant and they came into the rehearsal room and talked to us about, about how Greek theatre worked. They also produced a new translation from ancient Greek of the play as it existed, there's not much of it at all. And that was really great because it gave me the freedom to work off their translation, but also to completely go wild with it, to be very playful. And the play as it stands has, its first scene is it's kind of all that we have from Euripides really. And and it's very archaic in style, and it's deliberately playing on that kind of this is Greek theatre, and then immediately after that we go into a club scene. Contemporary kind of realist scene, so really wanted to play up those contrasts. I've definitely drifted away from the question! Research. I'm also a contemporary theatre researcher, which I guess means that I've watch a lot of plays and think about them and write about them and kind of apply academic theory to them sometimes, uhm. So yeah, I'd say that's that's a different headspace again. And maybe the criticism is another different headspace. I think I have said previously, maybe in job interviews, but my criticism is like a first draft of my research, I don't know that that's true because as Frey said, uhm, just thinking about the reviews you mentioned free, they're very playful and that's sort of what I love about Exeunt is that, it really encourages its writers to experiment with form and the form of theatre criticism. And so like for my review of there, there was a production at Top Girls of the National Theatre a few years ago and for that and I kind of took the famous dinner party scene and. Made it a discussion between all these male critics on Churchill and like thinking about Nick Hytner's idea of getting 50/50 gender representation in the National. I don't know whether they achieved that. Yeah, it was supposed to be done by 2020, but then there was pandemic, so who knows, we'll have to check those stats and. And then and. Then going into more of a traditional review of the play. And so yeah, that's my my take on research. Frey do you have anything to add?

FREY

Ah God, it's such a big topic, isn't it? Hopefully, we continue to talk about it throughout this, I guess, but I guess my initial thoughts are that in terms of *Andromeda*, I think that you did great such a great suggestive and interesting job in using the very beautiful translation that we had and responding to it in the scenes in ways that weren't always very direct. We, I think it prompted us to think a lot about, for instance, there was sometimes slight vocabulary echoes, I would say, but also, just our thinking around when we meet characters and how we meet characters and the feed of information that we get from them, I feel like was influenced by the fragments that we had to work with. And thinking about the structure of the play. How we move from what we called the chaos space, which were scenes where Andy and Percy were kind of in another in another slash undetermined different from setting and time and space sort of litigating their relationship with each other slash also going over things that they thought about themselves at that time, and then the more like primacy first scenes between them, which felt like memories and then moving from those to if you like reenactments or playful and sometimes quite serious reenactments of the fragments as translated, so I think that yeah, Hannah had such a lot to manage and the fact that you have done so much

research and thinking about form in your academic life, I think probably helped a lot with this and we had such a lot to dive into and play with in terms of the intimacy of this relationship and then, how that was impacted by these classical antecedents and yeah. I've done a lot there. What was I also going to talk about, research? Ah. This is definitely, yeah, this is a really big thing to talk about. I, I feel like I wish I had more time to devote just to learning. Sometimes as someone who I mean I didn't go to drama school, but I went to Oxford, which I think you know is worth bringing up the very tenderly, almost sinister hold that you know these institutions have on like the theatre industry still but. I think yeah, I didn't go to drama school. I haven't studied dramaturgy. You don't need to study dramaturgy formally at university or whatever to do it. And a lot of people in this country don't. Although there are institutions at which you can do that now. I did a sort of hands on short sort of course at the Royal Court called script panel which you mentioned which was really great and was the first kind of training I had in this, but I've been calling myself dramaturg and sort of hacking away at it before that. But whenever I am doing research about dramaturgy or just about theatre and I'm reading things 'cause I'm interested, I'm struck by the huge overlap there is between, I mean so many important Dramaturgs the past have been academics and also been theatre critics and writers. You can't really pull these things out from each other, and so much of the interesting things that have been written about dramaturgs are by academics, and it's the same with theatre criticism a lot of the time, not always, but a lot of the time and sometimes I get quite depressed and I'm like. Oh my God, ah, I need to go back to academia, but then I don't know how I feel about that. Also, I don't have the time or the money, but also I really need to learn German. Oh my God, I'm only going to rust in my thinking like what am I doing or like Oh my God I need to go to Europe and see a lot of cool theatre and take that in and stuff. And then I'm like, but I don't have any money. So yeah research is there. Yeah, research is bad.

MADELEINE

So much curiosity, so little time.

FREY

But I think that I'm managing it in quite haphazard way now that I'm just a freelancer balancing jobs and have like near full time job as well. Yes.

HELEN

I feel like the haphazardness of research is his research, but please tell me that it's true

FREY

that's true. I'm probably unfairly mischaracterizing you all as having so much time, and you're doing things in such a rigorous, full way. That's not fair of me at all.

HANNAH

No, but that is interesting thinking about. Yeah us as professional researchers. When actually maybe in reality it is, it is more haphazard. Yeah, I also think FREY because you've got this like instinctive understanding. Maybe instinct is not the right word, but you have accumulated an understanding of how plays work and how to work with playwrights. That which I certainly found working with you. But I don't think you need to go to drama school. I feel like. You've done, you've done your thing. You've done it.

FREY

Thank you, that's really, that's really comforting, thanks. I'll take that.

HANNAH

But also, like I've never. I've I've gone on a lot of short courses. I've never formally trained as a playwright, which is worth mentioning. I guess a few years ago I was like thinking like, I should do an MA in playwriting. I mean I didn't and I feel like the really good things about MA's. Are they give you time and space and kind of force you to write. But I feel that you can also learn on the job just just by writing as well.

MADELEINE

Well, I think it's worth mentioning like, we said this we've all sort of mentioned this in various ways and I think it's worth saying that we all have been at Oxford. I didn't go to undergrad here, I went to undergrad in in the States, which is a very different style of teaching and is like deliberately a sort of liberal arts space in which the kind of, I think the haphazardness that we're talking about is enforced. You're intended to go and learn several different things at once, and they're sort of, you're supposed to make the connections between them. I think there's something about the Oxford space that that requires you, if you want to do theatre, because we don't have a theatre department, to sort of forge that and do sort of practical work on your own. That you know it's quite different than going to drama school for theatre and also quite different than going to like taking theatre classes in the liberal arts undergraduate space.

HANNAH

Yeah, I find it from like the history of theatre at Oxford really interesting 'cause I think in that I need to check the dates but sometime in the mid 20th century there was like a report into whether drama should be formally taught at Oxford and and I think as someone decided that it wasn't rigorous enough to be to be taught for Oxford. Which I think is is kind of at the same time all these kind of professional drama departments were being set up like Bristol University, one of the first, I think the first drama department in the UK. But I would say that not having a drama department in some ways means that you can study drama as part of an English degree here, and that we've got this very alive student theatre scene, and I think it's I think it's partly scale. Actually just the amount of shows on every week means that I'm sure if you talk to people who've done their undergrad here, who were involved in theatre they would, they would say similar, but there's a lot of space to kind of learn on those shows up with all the caveats that Oxford is still under representative of various various groups and and I think some people have found the drama scene quite cliquy here as well. So as a caveat. But I think, thinking about graduate study and I, I agree with you Madeleine. I feel like in some ways you have to forge your own. Path because there isn't. In some ways I feel. Like people who do drama here are like really committed to drama, because in some ways it doesn't always seem to be that highly regarded by some people in the university, I would say. Not always, and I think TORCH has done amazing work like with bringing up with the network- I don't know what it's called now. Reimagining performance network. It was, I think, staging performance. TORCH actually funded some of some Andromeda and I think there's a real appetite now to get this kind of public facing engaging with the theatre industry. Kind of research and see where those two things meet. Because impact is a really big thing for universities. How research impacts the world, and so I think, yeah, maybe it it means that. You do have to have a slightly different perspective. Because it's a slightly more marginal part of the university.

HELEN

I did want to talk about, I think both of you in talking about the other, have said things like the ways in which your different for different kinds of work you do inform one another. Frey talking about Hannah your academic background and interest in form really informed your playwriting and your work on *Andromeda*, you also said that you like that in extreme criticism. Hannah, you've talked about phrase varied experiences, working with playwrights or something that really helped you in working on *Andromeda*. Can we talk a little bit more about that that multi-hyphenate experience and what it means to be; and actually on that the other thing you said Frey I wanted to come back to is is working a full time job alongside which is a different type of job experience that often gets left out of these...

FREY

Like we could both talk a lot about that. Do you want to go fast, Hannah?

HANNAH

Yeah, sure I'm. Yeah, I feel like it's very difficult, possibly impossible, to subsist as solely a theatre maker in this economy, like, unless you're really established, but even so, like playwrights write for television, and that's kind of how they live. Even like very big name playwrights. So I think you need to be a multihyphenate. I think academia is; so in some ways, doing the PhD - I was funded to do the PhD - really enabled me to pursue theatre practise alongside it because I was funded, like was earning a wage, and I could devote some of that time to theatre. And obviously you can, it's quite flexible, you can fit things around each other, you can have an R&D and go off and do that. I think looking - so throughout the PhD, I was like a researcher, a playwright and a critic, and I found those, sometimes it felt like I was being taken in different directions just in terms of demands on my time and like different head spaces, but I think actually it has - they do all speak to each other they do enrich each other and they... Like now I'm trying to turn my PhD in into a book and I'm trying to use it as a selling point I guess, that there is a kind of unique perspective you get from having seen many of these plays as a critic, having sort of written about them first and but also the understanding of how plays work, drama, dramaturgy from writing as a playwright I think gives you unique insights into them writing about contemporary feminist theatre. And so I think I think they all enrich each other. Also, because I'm a lecturer in creative writing, I felt my theatre practise was very helpful in getting me that job. It's if you want to stay in academia in a drama department, often being a practitioner is a really good way of doing that as well, and I guess being a lecturer is how some people support their creative practise. So I was reading about Winsome Pinnock yesterday. She worked at the University of Kingston for years and like she's an amazing playwright, but she supported herself by working at the University of Kingston as an associate professor in creative writing. So I think yeah, you need to support yourself in some way and I feel like, having a job where you can engage with students, help them with their own writing, be around plays, research is a great way of doing it.

FREY

That was great. I will now try and remember the question that you aimed at me. So I currently work at a theatre, an NPO organisation, a national portfolio organisation which means that it gets the set amount of money from Arts Council England every year and that is renewed every three years. So it's a relatively large theatre. I work in an administrative capacity there and I work there Monday to Thursday, And I also do my freelance dramaturgy, which is often script reading or being attached to our r&ds or productions and I also do my theatre reviewing. Theatre criticism is very poorly paid in this country. You cannot support yourself as a theatre critic in this country, unless you're like a staff

writer, possibly in something else, but also doing theatre reviews like at a broadsheet. So that plays into the theatre criticism that gets produced in this country. It's mostly by people who have very little time to spend with the play and have to file by like 9:00 AM the next morning, and so if you have a job as well, that requires you to, for instance, be somewhere in person, that has its own ramifications. Uhm, yeah, I think I really like the job that I have working in in an administrative capacity at a theatre. I think that it provides me with a lot of insight into other aspects of how theatre is made that are very useful, I think. Like theatre makers can sometimes characterise like marketers, arts marketers, which I would fall under, as kind of like enemy to the process and so on, but it's very difficult and also even theatre workers at buildings and theatre companies who aren't doing what we would term like strictly creative work, although they might actually be employing creative skills and abilities in their work anyway, but they are not often compensated very well either, especially when you compare it to any other industry. So yeah, I feel like I have probably learned interesting things about programming and the difficult balance of just keeping like a theatre building going, which I think is useful for my thinking when it comes to dramaturgy, criticism, or just like the grasp I have of what is going on in our industry, which I don't think I have, like a very comprehensive idea of what's going on. But yeah, yeah, useful. It's better to have a consideration of the way that probably everyone, most people that you come into contact with when you're working in theatre are dealing with similar things. Childcare for instance is so absolutely horrible when you are trying to work as a theatre maker, theatre worker. And to be honest about these things, yeah, and to generally advocate for just the correct compensation of all of our labour, which includes theatre critics as well as, you know, theatre administrators, technical workers, theatre actors and writers, and directors and everything, yeah.

MADELEINE

You were talking earlier about thinking about the play as a whole as a dramaturg, sort of the dramaturg role and I wonder if I can bring us back to *Andromeda* for a second and ask about; I was really struck. I had not thought about the fact that the play, the existing script is in fragments and it was making me think of Anne Carson's sort of fragmentary rewriting of Sappho and how she sort of left it fragmentary, I was originally going to ask you about the differences between working on a sort of older classic or a play that has been put on before and new work, but it sounds actually like *Andromeda* was somewhere in between, and I wonder how that experience was. Did it feel like new writing?

HANNAH

Yes, yeah, I think, uh, when Charlotte originally asked me if I wanted to come up over the project at this stage we have no funding, so it was very much like two people just sort of wanting to do it because it sounded like a cool idea. But I think at the beginning I thought, oh, it's an adaptation. It will be, will be less work than writing an original play, uh, which has not turned out to be the case. And also when I don't really use the word adaptation anymore with reference to *Andromeda*, I call it every imagining because basically just the first scene is is from is from that Euripides text. And then there are a tiny bit like a couple of lines of dialogue even individual words left from the play script so. It is, uh, kind of piecing together and some of the other sources we used were like Ovid, Ovid's metamorphosis. Obviously the *Andromeda* myth has been retold in many different ways over the years, and so sort of drawing on some of those different things, and also the kind of intellectual baggage, the kind of the racism and the sexism that has come with that myth and trying to confront that in our, in our reimagining and they kind of encounter with the present, uhm. So yeah, I. Wouldn't, yeah. So it's not an entirely original play in the sense that it was sort of based off off of

that myth, but it's also it's not a straightforward adaptation at all. Which was why it was helpful to have a dramaturg as well.

FREY

Come from my experience as well. I did my undergraduate degree in Classics and English, , which meant that I think I probably was more at home with this, even though I never did any Greek and thus could not be useful in a lot of ways. I'm more at home with this than I might have been otherwise. Ah, and although a lot of the classical research, I think especially had been finished like by the time that I got involved with *Andromeda*, I think it was still useful because for instance, like I was comfortable with some of the like pronunciation or could talk a little bit about some like the divine what's the word genealogy? genealogy? family trees a little bit sometimes, but I don't think that was needed to much really from me and it was more about the kind of work that goes along with new writing, as Hannah said. Being in the room, asking the right questions, recording things that might need recording. It felt very much like new writing, which means sort of always a bit of the unknown and trying to work out with the language of this thing is going to be come together, yeah?

HANNAH

Yeah, and I think your point about collaboration is really important, because *Andromeda* was such a collaborative process and it was from an idea by Charlotte, the director. But then I was sort of the playwright and wrote many drafts of the script with input from Frey. So it's sort of all-- and input from the actors, the various actors we had involved in the process so, I think it's really important to acknowledge that kind of multiple authorship and possibly in I know there is co-authorship in academia, but possibly less in the humanities or less in our field, and I think so to me, the collaborative spirit of a rehearsal room is just so amazing so energy-giving and I would love to have more of that collaboration in academia, but it does also bring those problems of like acknowledgement. How do you acknowledge people's contribution? Particularly if they're like, scrapping around for jobs, for publications, and maybe it gets trickier and that it's maybe because the conditions. Are not good that it's maybe harder to maintain that collegial spirit in academia, and because it I would say the job market almost encourages you to feel like you're in competition with everyone, which is really destroying, destroying joy.

HELEN

And if I can say something like, sappy and hopefully a bit more positive after these negatives, but Madeleine and I work together a lot.

MADELEINE

I was about to say this too!

HELEN

I'm getting really emotional! But we do regularly say to one another and to other people that one of the like really greatest joys of our PhD's respectively has been the work that we do together, and getting to work with one another so. I still feel that about collaboration, it does really improve academia as much as it improves creative work. Although how do you describe a podcast about researching performance? Is that academic or creative? Who knows?

MADELEINE

Well, I think I mean if I can sort of position, Helen and myself here as well. Like we have both sort of worked before and within our graduate work in theatre and I think that's something that I've seen-- I sort of wish that, I almost wish this wasn't a podcast, although it's a very warm day and I'm very glad that nobody can see my face-- but that you know, whenever any of us talks about collaboration, it's the thing that lights us up. And I wonder, actually I was going to ask if you if you each have sort of a favourite thing about working in theatre, about being a dramaturg or a playwright or a critic, if there's something that that brings you back to it and that you get a lot of joy out of? I know I'm gonna, I'm gonna throw in here that I for me I think both academically and in theatre, it's like getting to create something almost communally with other people. Despite sort of the frustration of attribution etc, that that seems to be the like the joy of it.

HANNAH

Yeah, I think I'd echo that. I think there's. I just really enjoy being in a rehearsal room and kind of taking maybe a world that's been in your head and only your head and like sharing it with other people and then having the most amazing ideas. Maybe about characters and saying, oh, I think they're like this, and like I'd never thought about it like that before and also I guess being able to be a bit vulnerable and kind of give quite a rough draft or something to two actors or to Frey and then they just take it in in a new direction and just very generously build on it to what it could be. And I think also with reviewing, there are times that have been reviewing and this is kind of theatre Twitter and it's a good thing. Which I guess Twitter is always a double sided thing, but there are times when I've been reviewing and it feels like we're in a conversation about the show, not necessarily between me and the creators, but between me and other people who've seen here other critics. Maybe like all these theatre nerds are having this conversation, which I think is really special and I guess you don't get that quite so much in academic work just because the timescales of publication. Like maybe you get it at conference. But it's harder to come by, so I think that kind of, yeah, collegiality, collaboration and is what I like about it.

FREY

Those are both such lovely answers. I feel like at its best, uhm, working in theatre helps to sort of make sense of the world because it can feel like it itself makes very direct sense when you're, just working with some people to find out how to make a thing do the things you need it to, make it the truest version of itself, and you're hopefully drawing closer to kind of understanding what each other means by how you're talking about this thing. And I think that it can remind you of various reasons to be hopeful, and it's hard to kind of separate that out from the work that we need to do. Just improving things in the world and how sometimes it can be quite direct and simple. And often times it's not and it feels very difficult and beholden to kind of big structures and pressures and tensions, but that it can sometimes be made very simple and direct when you're just there with people and trying to work out how to be useful in a way that hopefully isn't too harsh on yourself for when you aren't able to be useful, yeah?

HELEN

Oh, that's again, such a lovely answer. I think what I think what I would say is my favourite thing about all of these different kinds of work is I I have heard or read people describing both criticism and performance as archaeological? I'm going to have to look up who said that as, as we've ascertained, attribution is very important. But I I think about that a lot, and I often describe my research process itself as like I turn up with a metal detector and I'm like, I know there's something down there, but I'm literally not doing what it is, I'm just gonna have to keep digging until I find out

what it is. I feel that way about a lot of the creative process as well. Knowing that there is something and digging until you find it, and then when you've got it, like brushing it down and fine tuning it and doing that cool thing they did with the Sphinx where they work out what colour it was, and you know, like everything there is that knowing that there is something almost on instinct and then having to do an awful lot of work to find it, and that's sort of the satisfaction of all the stages of that process. And bringing in what others have said like working with others on that is such a joy, both when it's someone else helping you find something, but also. You know, having been a dramaturg in a room, there is something so satisfying about seeing that to do something with it, you know, like that's brilliant, like you found the thing that no one else could find, and that's wonderful. So yeah, something around this is very metaphorical, been a very non literal day today. But yeah, there is so much joy in that.

MADELEINE

That's really lovely, I mean I think is a nice way to end this conversation. 'cause we've kind of gone through some quite thorny bits of being an academic and a practitioner at this particular moment of change and to kind of come away, thinking about, I don't know-- I feel quite excited to get back in a room after this and to sort of collaborate with other people. And I'm so excited to see if there's a next version of *Andromeda* and what the two of you make after this.

HELEN

I was. Just going to ask is there anything coming up that you are excited about, would like to talk about, either to plug or just express excitement about?

FREY

Uhm, I'm involved with making a new musical called Asian Pirate Musical which is ongoing. I think our R&D is soon. Uhm, keep an eye out for that. If you have lots of money, please give it to us! Making a new musical is incredibly long and expensive if you want to do it in a not-fringe way, which we do.

HANNAH

Yeah, I don't, I don't really have a shout at the moment. I'm going to the Edinburgh Fringe next week and I'm very excited just to see stuff, so I'm excited to be seeing theatre and just so excited that they just seems to be back after all the closures. I think that's exciting.

HELEN

All that is exciting. That is a nice note to end on, getting to see more theatre, doing R&D for more theatre, Asian pirate musical, anyone who has money to send in.

This has been Practice Makes: The Oxford Reimagining Performance Podcast with Helen Dallas and Madeleine Saidenberg. Thanks for listening.