

# SKAMnanigans S1E3 Transcript

(upbeat music)

Hello and welcome to "SKAMnanigans," the theatre SKAM podcast. "SKAMnanigans" brings you into the whimsical and wacky world of theatre. I'm your host, Branden Sugden. (upbeat music) Let the "SKAMnanigans" begin.

Early career artists are a scrupulous bunch. They have to be diligent about making a good impression, to push the envelope without stepping on any toes, and be considerate of all the small details that add up to a feast for your imagination. Many of the most scrupulous artists do all that while also making their scruples known, an even more impressive tightrope act, exploring oftentimes touchy subjects. This week, I had a scrum with some artists from the University of Victoria, and we scrimmaged away about their scrumptious play, "Scruples." Specifically, I spoke with playwright Molly Jamin and actor Erin Bess. I was excited to hear the perspective of a couple artists who presented work at the Victoria One Act Play Festival. (upbeat music)

Hi, Molly and Erin.

Hi.

Thank you so much for joining us on "SKAMnanigans." So you both worked on a show at the Victoria One Act Play Festival that happened two weeks ago, right?

Yes, yeah.

Well, first, can you just introduce yourselves one at a time and tell me what you did on the show and something interesting about yourself?

Hi, I'm Erin. I just finished second year at UVic. I played Hannah in Molly's play "Scruples," and I'm a playwright. I play scruples, and I'm also a type 1 diabetic.

Hi, I'm Molly. I wrote "Scruples," and an interesting thing about myself is that along with writing and theatre, which are my first loves, I'm also studying ancient Greek language and literature up at the university with hopes of translating someday.

Wow, that's cool. That is a niche skill, translating ancient Greek. So can you tell me, Molly, a little bit about "Scruples"? What's the play about?

Yeah, so "Scruples" is sort of this one-act dramatic comedy that started in one of my playwrighting classes up at the university and sort of just evolved from there. It follows

four teenage girls at an evangelical summer camp as they plan to steal back items that were confiscated from them by the head counsellor, items that within the camp are viewed as less than holy. So we've got a steamy love letter from Erin's character's girlfriend. We've got a scapular that was given to one of our characters by her grandmother, and we've got what essentially acts as like a promise ring that our main character, Esther, was very keen on getting back.

And so what inspired you to write "Scruples"?

So "Scruples" was inspired partly by my own relationship with religion and attending an evangelical church for a part of my childhood. I've always found religion absolutely fascinating, and even now that I'm not technically in the church, I still get to experience religion in a way through my studies. I get to study ancient Hellenic religion, and it's very fun through an academic lens. I think what we hoped to do with "Scruples" was partly highlight the struggles of women and girls in conservative Christian communities, but it was also really important to me to affirm the more comforting aspects of personal faith and highlight spiritual autonomy, what it means to make your own decisions about your faith and your beliefs. And I hope that's what rang true in the performance, the idea that each of the girls and even the camp counsellor, Mrs. Clare, had their own very personal, very different relationship with faith, and we got to see it through a bunch of lenses, like Maria being a Latina immigrant and her relationship with Catholicism versus Christianity and what that looked like from an immigrant perspective, and Esther as the daughter who feels like she never got a choice in the matter, Mrs. Clare as a religious leader struggling with her loyalty to her faith versus her loyalty to her family. And then I'm sure Erin can better than anyone talk about Hannah's relationship with her faith and her sexuality.

Yeah, so Molly did an absolutely beautiful job writing Hannah. I just fell in love with her right away. At the audition, Hannah was who I was asked to read for, and the scene that Molly and Stevie, our director, had everybody read for Hannah was this beautiful scene in the play where she talks about her own relationship to God, and she reminisces with her best friend, Esther, just about how it all felt when they were kids, and she has these really fond memories of growing up in the church and at camp, and I read for that, and I just found that so beautiful because her experience is very similar to mine. Molly also held a little religion talk at our very first rehearsal, which I loved, where we all sort of shared our personal experiences with religion, and that's where I got to talk about relating to Hannah. I grew up with a United Church, which is a very queer-affirming and sort of lovely church, and just grew up with a great community there, and I was still sort of on a journey of, I guess, finding how I still identify with being Christian, whether I still do. I'm not sure I still identify too much with religion, but I am super very blessed to have grown up with such an amazing and queer-affirming church community as a queer person. And Hannah reminiscing about how she felt and how magical everything felt to her as a kid, I really resonated

with that, and it was just so special to get to play this character that Molly has dreamed up, and I wish I had more time with her, but you never know.

So was this both of your first experiences working on the Victoria One Act Play Festival?

It was definitely my first experience, and yes, it was also my first experience.

Cool, what was your experience like working on the One Act Play Festival?

From the very beginning, I received nothing but warmth and support from the entire team, Kurt especially. They organized the dramaturgy workshop this year, and I think their main focus this year and what came out of the dramaturgy workshop especially was the idea of community. For someone who is a little more introverted, I find the whole networking part of theatre extremely daunting, so getting to be able to meet all of my peers and the people working on the festival in this kind of low-stakes, script-focused environment was extremely lovely, yeah.

And you, Erin?

Yeah, it was also my first time working at the Victoria One Act Play Festival, and it was just so much fun. It went by so quickly. Everything happened so fast, but I just was remembering last year how badly I wanted to be able to be in a time theft production and be in a show at the One Act Play Festival, and so I just had this very cool moment on stage of being like, "Oh my goodness, I made it. I'm here, and this is what I've been wanting to do," since first really becoming aware of it and becoming aware of time theft, and it was just so cool. We had the actors that were on stage in the beginning of "Scruples." We had about 20 minutes where we were preset on stage as the audience was coming in, and during that time, my character started lying on one of the beds in the cabin and just tossing a ball back and forth, and so I had about 20 minutes to just take it all in, and that was incredible.

I have another question for you, Erin. I'm curious what sort of experience you have at UVic, whether that be through SATCO productions or directing scenes and how working on "Scruples" differed from those experiences at school.

I've been referring to "Scruples" as my time theft debut, I guess, but I was actually in a SATCO production called "My Own Soul" last November, and we've been calling that kind of a time theft production because so many friends from time theft worked on that show. Aidan Finn, he directed it and was incredible as my director, and it was just sort of a really great group, which felt like working on a time theft production but wasn't technically quite yet that, but that was so much fun, and I have not stopped talking about it, and that was my first SATCO I'd ever been in. First year, I did a few directed scenes as well, and those were very fun, and unfortunately this past year, I

didn't quite have time to do as many, but I am hoping to continue and do more this year. So working on "Scruples," it was just so cool to finally be able to say this is a time theft show that I get to be in after wanting to be in them for so long, but I had the experience of working on my own soul with a lot of the people who worked on "Scruples," so it was a great mix of working with people who I knew pretty well, and also working with people like Stevie, for example, who I had never worked with and didn't know what to expect about Stevie's directing style or anything like that, but they were just so fantastic and such a praiseful director, and I really appreciate that. But also, of course, being in a show that was then in the, and for the festival, was very cool. It was very cool to work on a show and play a character who I share so many experiences with.

I should also say for those who don't know, listening to the podcast, SATCO is the Student Alternative theatre Company that's at UVic. It's student-organized and produced theatre that happens during lunch hours. Jumping off of that, a question for you both. Obviously, the audience for SATCO productions is very different from the kind of audience you would have at an event like the Victoria One Act Play Festival, particularly given that it's happening at the Belfry. So what was your experience like with that in terms of finding a difference in the audience and were you surprised at all about the way that they reacted to the show or certain moments?

It was definitely different. Getting to have that sort of built-in audience of Belfry goers and also people who came to directly support the artists makes for this very interesting amalgamation of audience goers. I always find it so interesting to sort of pick out the moments that an audience laughs at or has emotions towards in a script. And it's always so different. Like when I workshoped scruples up on campus at the university, lots of the bits that I thought were so funny, everyone else thought was so funny because they're all in my age demographic and almost social circle. And then when we get to even like a different audience, like having my parents read the script through like I don't quite get that one. So getting to notice which bits stuck with them was very interesting, very rewarding as a playwright, getting to learn what works and what doesn't. I would say one thing I appreciate about both audiences for SATCOs and for the festival is that despite them being different demographics and having different reactions to different things, the energy is always really great. I guess I can only speak to the energy for one show at the festival. But one thing I appreciate about SATCO is your audience is full of your peers typically and people you've invited, your classmates. And often, again, they are laughing at the bits and just wanting to have a great time and wanting to support you. And so the energy is very high, very fun. And that was the case I found the same thing for the festival, which is super affirming and so important for an actor when you're on stage to feel like there are reactions to the things you're doing and little jokes that you work so hard with your director and with your castmates to find in a script and to polish. It's so amazing when those get appreciated and noticed.

What was your favourite part of working on the Victoria One Act Play Festival?

I think I sort of went into this before, but really their commitment to establishing a welcoming artist community in Victoria. I think that would have to be my favourite part of the festival. The team at Between Words worked incredibly hard to sort of build this community. And it was very nice to have this sort of built-in group of supportive, really interesting, passionate people who I got to share this with.

One thing I really loved, and I've sort of been talking about it ever since, is how in-depth the adjudication process was. I went into this not really knowing what to expect at all in terms of what the adjudication would look like, how in-depth it would be, how personal it would be. And it was just so special to have it be such a personal learning experience where we could sit down and hear notes about our show, what went well in it, what could be worked on, and how to potentially have it go further. That was very cool, and I wasn't expecting that, but I really felt I walked out of the Belfry feeling like I'd gained so much more knowledge.

That was definitely a thing for me as well. Julia MacIsaac did such an in-depth, very, very insightful job of really taking this apart in a fantastic way. And what Erin mentioned earlier about possibly bringing it forward, I hadn't thought of. I thought, "We'll do the play, it'll be great, "and then it'll be done." But I had so many people coming up to me, people from the theatre community, people not from the theatre community, being like, "So where are you gonna take this? "What are you gonna do next with this?" And I hadn't even considered that. And so that was super exciting for me as a writer.

100%. And that's something that I think about a lot, and we think about a lot at SKAM when we develop new shows is how can it live on? There's this discussion that we had, we were recently in Montreal at PACTcon, which is the Professional Association of Canadian theatres Conference. And there's a lot of creator-centric companies in the country who are focused on creating new plays. And there's a lot of talk about like, yeah, doing premieres is great, but who does the second production of a play? And that's actually a big missing step oftentimes for plays going on to have sort of a life of their own after the premiere. And that actually transitions really well into a question I was going to ask at the end, but I'm just gonna ask now, what do you see the future of "Scruples" being? Or do you know yet? It was not that long ago.

It was a really nice response, and so many people sort of hankering for more of this story that I do. I would love to probably end up with a two-act show. And we had lots of different suggestions, and Julie MacIsaac even gave some suggestions that I am following up on. But yeah, I would love to see the development of each of the altar girls, as we're calling them, the four girls in the camp. I would love to see their development go even further. I want to go even further with Hannah's experience as a queer woman growing up in the church. I want to go even further with Maria's

experience as an immigrant and look more into her grandmother's indigenous traditions and how that sort of mixed with Catholicism when Spanish colonizers came. You know, there's a fascinating concept in South America about folk Catholicism and how this sort of mixed with indigenous practices to create this whole new subset of these two sort of cultures and religions. I'd love to go even further with Esther. Someone suggested Esther doing rock ballads during the transitions, and that sounds hilarious. But yeah, I think my work is very character-driven, and to get the opportunity to just go even more into these characters would be a joy.

So Erin, was this your first time playing an original character and playing a character for the first time?

No, actually. So with "Sacko," I was in "My Own Soul," which was written by Ella McDonald, who played Esther in "Scruples." Connections are everywhere. She wrote a beautiful character named Byron, the protagonist of her play, and I played Byron. So that was maybe not my first time originating a character either, but recently, absolutely. And I also absolutely fell in love with Byron. And so it's been really cool to get to play two characters written by my friends in the past year or so who are just so complex and so cool.

So shifting focus a little bit more broadly speaking, what is it like to be an emerging artist based in Victoria right now? You're both still in school. So what is that experience like as you try to balance school and your artistic practice outside of an academic setting?

I moved to Victoria from a small town in the Kootenays about three years ago to attend university. And though I adore my small town, I never quite felt like I fit in there. And so being able to find a community of interesting, passionate, like-minded artists has been incredibly affirming for me and for my work. I think all of the opportunities that are being given and developed for young, hungry, emerging artists in Victoria is wonderful, but even more than wonderful. It's absolutely essential. Opportunities to participate in showcases like Impulse Theatre's Peak Show, and now the One Act Festival really support this idea that art is here to stay, theatre is not dying. We have young, committed people willing to take up these torches. Yeah, it's so special to be in the Phoenix program where I am surrounded by theatre all day, every day, and surrounded by friends and the peers that I've worked on these shows with. I just really feel so blessed every day to have this opportunity to be studying at UVic in theatre. Not many people get to do that or get to be in my position. I had been wanting to attend theatre at UVic for a long time, since I was about 13 or 14. UVic was always just the school that I wanted to attend, that my family hoped I would attend. And in the Phoenix program, I can remember touring UVic at 14 and sort of sneaking my way into the Phoenix building and asking at the box office, you know, any questions I had on my mind. And so it's so special and so full circle that I get to study here and be surrounded by theatre and all of the opportunities that come with

that. This summer is the first summer that I've stayed in Victoria. Last summer I went home and really felt this summer I wanted to stay here and be able to take advantage of as many theatre opportunities in Victoria as I could because there are so many and it's only midway through June and I've already been able to do so much and that's really cool.

Fantastic. And finally, just wrapping up, going even more broad, as an artist, what is one thing that you are grateful for and one thing that you look forward to?

Oh man, I don't wanna get too sappy with it, but I am incredibly grateful that I have a family and a family unit that is so supportive of what many might politely call an alternative career path or what others would call a waste of time. I don't have editors. I have my mom and my dad. They've read every iteration, every draft of every piece I've ever put forward. They're my true north in the sense that every good thing I do, every wonderful opportunity I take just points back to them. And I said I was gonna be getting sappy.

In terms of the future, in terms of things I'm looking forward to, I wouldn't have thought it when I first started this process, but I am looking forward to further developing this show and really, really just hammering out all of the kinks. I am naturally kind of a perfectionist, but I do really believe that through collaboration, you can really hammer down an almost perfect piece.

I also, when you asked this question, immediately knew that I was gonna get sappy and I have pretty much the same answer as Molly and that it's just about the people and of course the work I get to do. Like I said, the character work I absolutely love getting to do, but it's about the people that you get to be a part of shows with and get to work on shows with. And through Time Theft and through the Phoenix program, I've just met so many amazing artists and that's really what I feel the most grateful for. And in terms of what I look forward to, those sort of go hand in hand because I just look forward to, I hope getting to keep working on shows with all of these people and keep being a part of things like the Victoria When I Play Festival, hopefully Scruples, and I just never want that to stop. So the future is what I look forward to.

Well, thank you so much for joining us on SKAM Nanigans. If people want to follow the future of Scruples or of your own artistic practices, is there somewhere that they can find you on the internet?

Yeah, my Instagram is jones\_jamin, J-A-M-I-N. And while we're here, I'll also plug the Time Theft Instagram because they are the theatre company that really helped produce this show. And their Instagram is just @timethefttheatre.

Amazing. I'll also plug my Instagram. It's erin.\_.bess, B-E-S-S.

Fantastic. Like I said, again, thank you so much for coming on SKAMnanigans. We really appreciate having you on the show.

Thank you so much. It's been a lot of fun.

(upbeat music)

I'm always inspired after chatting with talented artists that choose to make Victoria their home. I feel positively charmed to be surrounded by such creativity. Fostering this talent is what I love about working at Theatre SKAM. We get to create a platform to showcase these magnificent storytellers for your viewing pleasure. Speaking of viewing pleasure, tickets for the 16th Annual SKAMPede Festival are on sale now. The festival runs from July 12 to 14, 2024, and you can buy your tickets on our website, SKAM.ca. In our next episode, which will air next week, I catch up with a few previous SKAMPede artists, the folks from Braggie Theatre, to pick their brains about their experience at this year's One Act Play Festival. Thanks for listening to this episode of SKAM Nanigans. I look forward to pum-pum-pum-pumming on your eardrums again soon.

(upbeat music)

Theatre SKAM is grateful to live, work, and create on the traditional territories of the Lekwungen people, now known as the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations. SKAM Nanigans is hosted by me, Branden Sugden. Our producer is Logan Swain. Special thanks to our guests, Molly Jamin and Erin Bess. Our marketing materials and graphics are by Janine Joplinski. We would like to acknowledge the support of our operational funders, the BC Arts Council, and the Capital Regional District for their support of Theatre SKAM. SKAM Nanigans can be found wherever you get your podcasts. Subscribe to get notified when new episodes drop. Transcripts for our episodes are available on our website at SKAM.ca/podcast. Thank you so much for listening.

(upbeat music)