

# SKAMnanigans S1E5 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. Let the "SKAMnanigans" begin. It is officially July in Victoria. The sun is shining, the birds are chirping, the cruise ships are docking. It's the most wonderful time of the year. My favourite part of this season is the way the flocks of geese in the Inner harbour seem to magically transform one weekend a year into troops of performance artists. Some dance, some play music, some puppeteer. You're always in for a treat when the geese decide to have mercy on us path goers and honk a more pleasant tune than their usual repertoire. That's right, the smell of SKAM is in the air. This year, we are in for all kinds of spectacles, classic and new. But first, for the uninitiated, I think I had better make sure you all know what SKAM is. Logan, can you tell our listeners what SKAM is all about?

SKAM is our annual outdoor site-specific and site-responsive performance festival. Every July, audiences see four short shows in a row outdoors in the beautiful summer weather. At home, you're probably wondering what is site-specific and site-responsive theatre? Site-specific theatre, or performance, is a show that is created specifically for the environment that it is performed in. The SKAM show that SNAFU is doing this year is an example of that. And site-responsive is how I refer to all of the other shows in that they are responding to the environment that they are being performed in, but they're not necessarily created specific to that location. And that's what makes SKAM so great is that it's live, it's outdoors. You never know what's gonna happen when you're at the mercy of the elements and the geese, and it's just a hoot and a half.

Well, when you put it that way, it sounds like a roaring good time. How can people book their tickets to see SKAM?

You can get tickets at [SKAM.ca/skam](http://SKAM.ca/skam), or you can find us at one of our two launch points the weekend of the festival. Tickets are pay what you can with a suggested donation of \$10 per person or \$20 for a family. The central tour launch point is at 860 Central Spur Road, and the Songhees Tour launch point is at Songhees Park Plaza. Thanks for enlightening us with all the important deets, Logan. This week, I had a gab with the folks from SNAFU Society of Unexpected Spectacles making their seventh appearance at SKAM and local improvisational hotshots Cowboy, both of whom will be featured on the central tour to get a taste of what's to come in one week's time. And one final note before you indulge in our delectable discussion, I think you should know that after I interviewed Kathleen, Jeni, Islay, and Lauren, I

happened to notice one of those dastardly geese gnawing on a microphone cable. So if you hear some snaps, crackles, and pops, please forgive us. And come find me on the trail next week if you would like to support the Theatre SKAM Goose Defense Fund. Without further ado, our interview with SNAFU and Cowboy.

Hello everyone. Thank you so much for joining us on SKAMnigans. Before we begin, I just wanna offer the room an opportunity to go around and introduce ourselves to our listeners.

Hi, my name is Kathleen Greenfield and I'm the co-artistic producer of SNAFU Society of Unexpected Spectacles, and I'm co-creating and performing our show, The Great Triscuit Heist.

Hi, I'm Jeni Luther. I am a company artist with SNAFU for the last 11 years. And this will be my fifth SKAMnigans show in a row, I think.

My name is Lauren Ball. I also collaborate with SNAFU primarily doing marketing.

Hi, my name is Islay McKechnie. I'm a collaborator with SNAFU on The Great Triscuit Heist and one half of the theatre company, Cowboy.

I'm really excited to have you here to tell us all about your SKAMnigans show. So this year, SNAFU is doing The Great Triscuit Heist, and I'm just wondering what can audiences expect from The Great Triscuit Heist?

SNAFU is sticking on brand with our totally surreal, abstract, movement-based, nonverbal spectacle.

On brand is fantastic. SNAFU's work for the past five iterations of SKAMnigans have been fantastic every year. And you sort of mentioned the brand, I guess, for the SKAMnigans shows that SNAFU has done in recent times, which trend toward nonverbal, surreal performance. And I'm just curious, what sort of opportunities and challenges are presented by working on shows like this?

By choosing not to use language, we avoid excluding anybody who doesn't speak English or doesn't understand language. It makes it more accessible to those groups. And the challenge of that is trying to give instructions to audience members without using words. And so when the audience enter, we always try to build in a fun way to get them to sit where we want them to sit or welcoming them into the space. And I kind of love that we don't use language to do that because it means we have to figure out creative ways to directly interact with audience members.

One of the positives of doing shows like this without using language is that it allows for more opportunity to improvise. And because you do the show over and over and

over again, it's fun to have the chance to sort of shift it up in different ways. The challenge I would say is that I somehow always seem to choose ridiculous sounds that are hard to make and I make them over and over and over again. And by the end of the day, I don't have a voice. So that's my problem. That's my challenge.

I also wanted to mention that it also is great because the trails along both sides of SKAMnanigans now are both very loud. Like, you know, people in the hot tub floating down to loud music or on the other side competing with the planes and the harbour traffic. We've really successfully been able to communicate with our audiences and some people who have more script-heavy work really are challenged by competing with those sounds and having to project, especially when they're emerging artists who maybe haven't developed those projection skills. And so I'm always really happy to present something to the audience that's not gonna be in competition with all of the natural sounds of the trail.

That is a very excellent point. It is hard to compete with sea planes. So having had quite a bit of experience with SKAMnanigans, I'm curious, what is your favourite part about participating in the festival as an artist?

My favourite part about performing in SKAMnanigans as a clown is that the most important clown rule is that it's not about what you're doing, it's about how you feel about it. So when we perform 20 times in a day, the exact same actions with the exact same framework, every single performance for me as a clown is a little bit different. And I get to investigate a new part of my clown or a new way that my clown feels about the action. So it's really, really rewarding for clown performers, people who are studying or learning the clown practice to have that opportunity to just do it over and over and over again. Because usually with shows, you only get to perform it like top three times when you're in indie theatre. So to be able to, yeah, to go deeper and deeper and deeper into that is really fun.

Yeah, I would say my favourite part about SKAMnanigans that I've learned over the last however many years is the audiences. I really, really enjoy getting to interact with them, especially the kids. I love that we're so close to them, we're often walking around between them, we're often picking one of them to sort of, not to scare anyone off here, but, you know, picking one of them to sort of be the person who holds something or does something. I really enjoy that and I enjoy also learning who to choose. Because that's always a fun moment and who's gonna hold your eyes when you're looking around and obviously searching for someone. Yeah, but the audiences at SKAMnanigans are always just, they're so great. They're so durable walking in the heat. And so, you know, I give them a lot of credit for it because they're the ones that you're feeding off of all the time. So, you know, if you have a really, really great 10 minutes, it's usually because the audience that came in fed you and then you performed really well. So that's what I like about it.

So Ayla, it's your first SKAMnigans and you've started working with SNAFU and Avi quite recently since working on New Earth Bandits. So I'm curious what it has been like to work with SNAFU as someone who's sort of newer to this collaboration.

It's been the best experience ever. And I'm not just saying that because Kathleen and Jeni are in the room. I would say that to anyone at any point in time. I'm really inspired by their focus on design and spectacle. I think that's so exciting. And I also love how community-oriented the rehearsal processes and the creative projects are in every aspect. I'm super inspired by that and very glad to be a part of anything that they make. I think it's really cool that I get to be involved.

For you, Kathleen and Jeni, what's it like working with Ayla?

Ayla is actually one of the funniest people I have ever met. And that's saying something. It's almost everything. When we start talking, this person can commit to a bit like nobody's business. And we'll take it down roads that are absolutely hilarious and so unique and so creative. And also, this is also an incredible musician sitting here beside me. So yeah, the things that Ayla comes up with are amazing. Yeah. And I'm not just saying that because Ayla's sitting right beside me.

I also think Ayla has a really amazing drive to produce their work, which I think is really challenging sometimes when you're younger, emerging, coming into this community is that kind of like, I have a massive creative drive, which is really awesome. But then also Ayla has a drive to get people to see what they're working on, which it's like being a double threat, self-producing artist. But Ayla's also a triple threat 'cause they also make music.

So Ayla touched on the design element of SNAFU's shows. And that's something that's always really stood out to me is the intricacy and detail of the mechanics of costumes and props and set pieces and like puppetry in a sense that is brought to SKAMnigans, which I also find so impressive because the circumstances of SKAMnigans can be quite challenging when it comes to bringing those elements into the show. So I'm curious, what sort of factors do you consider when approaching the construction of those pieces? And what have you learned from bringing those kinds of pieces to a festival like SKAMnigans?

So when Ingrid and I started working together and creating work with SNAFU, we always focused on site-specific theatre and specifically theatre that is responding specifically to the environment that it's in. And so when we started doing SKAMnigans together, back when it was bike ride, it was always our mission to use the environment that we were given and respond directly to that environment. So we've never written a play and then said, "Oh, it could be here or it could be here." Or, you know, like we've always created our performances specific to the spots that we've chosen. And I think that's the most important nugget about why SNAFU

SKAMnanigans shows have been so successful is because we start with the environment and we renamed our company, SNAFU Society of Unexpected Spectacles, because that's basically what we do. Like we're really interested in spectacle and how visual language speaks to a different part of our bodies. So audiences respond to the visual. And I know I'm challenged sometimes in listening to long drawn out text, I kind of lose my focus. And so we've always kind of created our imagery in order to speak authentically to people who maybe don't respond to text, I guess. I don't know if that makes any sense, but I wanted to pass it over to Jeni anyways, because Jeni is the brain behind our visual world for SKAMnanigans for many years now.

I think specifically for SKAMnanigans, there's a lot of factors. I personally, in my visual art, like to work with found objects. I like to work with junk. I like to work with recycled things that I find. The sustainable fox was really great in helping with some of that as well. But I think during SKAMnanigans, the things that you really need to think about are heat and durability. So when you're out there, you have to think about wearing things that are breathable and that you can take on and off really, really fast and really easily. Also, I really just enjoy working with strange things that you wouldn't think would go together. You know, pool noodles and cardboard and things. Last year, we worked with old suitcases and we made little worlds out of old suitcases and then worked them into the cycle of life that we presented to everybody. And those kinds of things are really fun. And I enjoy creating these little worlds that we then have for 10 minutes over and over again for a few days.

I just wanna throw one more thing in. And what you mentioned about old suitcases is that's often how the kind of design idea starts or the world begins is like, Jeni will be like, "I wanna make worlds out of old suitcases." And then we build a whole narrative around that. So this year, it was actually Ingrid who wrote the blurb, "The Great Triscuit Heist." And then basically we're building the whole show around the shape of a triscuit.

The triangle triscuits.

The triangle, not the square one.

Specifically.

An important distinction for sure. I'm gonna switch gears for just a moment. Islay, you are bravely working on two SKAMnanigans shows at the same time. So I just wanted to ask you a little bit about the show that you're doing with Cowboy, "Fast Bus." What can audiences expect from "Fast Bus?"

Oh my. What can audiences expect from "Fast Bus?" Audiences can expect to literally get on board. Well, I guess it's not literal because it's not a real bus, but

audiences will be able to get on a simulated bus with the cast and enter into an immersive, improvised, musical, theatrical experience. I'm working with Ciaran Volkey, who is the other half of Cowboy, and two other collaborators as well. Yeah, audiences can expect to be taken on a journey that the actors are also finding sort of in tandem with the audience. And I think it'll be really fun.

So as folks who are currently working on a SKAMnanigans show and who some of us have worked on several SKAMnanigans shows in the past, I'm curious what piece of advice you would give to artists who want to create site-responsive theatre.

I would say go and sit in your site. And Islay was kind of talking about this, like have a listen, lay down on the grass or the cement or wherever you are and listen to the environment at the time of day that you will be performing. Because a lot comes out of the environment that you might not realize is relevant. Like just because we've done it for so long, it's like I know the feeling of the different environments and they give you so much. They give you so much inspiration. And I would also say, don't be too hard on yourself about not being as prepared as you think you are. Because on the day of the show, you perform it so many times. I know this is probably bad advice to the producers of SKAMnanigans. Like don't prepare too much. But it's true. Like don't over-prepare yourself because you have opportunities to continue to deepen the performance. Having an opportunity to repeat it over and over again, a lot of your, I don't wanna say rehearsal, but it's like a lot of your understanding of what you're performing comes when the audience arrives and you're performing with them. And it's really challenging to try to visualize that before the actual event if it's your first time.

Yeah, I also, I would say something that we've done when we're making up the show is to, same thing, sit in the space and listen and also maybe just start writing down words. And it doesn't necessarily have to be words that you hear or see or anything else because sometimes just things will all of a sudden pop in your mind. And if you have two or three people sitting just writing words, you get a wealth of ideas from that. And then sometimes putting those words together, you can just come up with great stuff, literally in 10 minutes.

One more thing about sitting in the space at the time when you'll be performing is also remember to be considerate of your audience when setting your stage so that the audience isn't looking at you and getting a sunburned face.

Yeah, because I've gone to see enough SKAMnanigans shows where I ended up physically getting irritated and not being able to watch the show because I have sun glaring in my face. And so just take that into account when you're kind of figuring out how you're gonna situate your audience.

And also for yourself because you're going to be there all day. So sunblock, sunblock, sunblock.

100%, especially if you're not gonna be wearing sunglasses all day, you don't wanna be staring straight into it for however long you're out on the trail on a day that's hours and hours. So Fast Bus and The Great Triscuit Heist are both on the central tour for SKAMnanigans. So my question to the room is what is your elevator pitch for why people should come see the central tour of SKAMnanigans this year?

I like the central tour because it's classic. It's the Galloping Goose at its most awesome. The central tour has much more shade for those who are allergic to the sun. And I find that the variations of spaces, it's like the central tour, you turn a corner and it's like a different landscape. So you see a huge variation. Also, I wanna say that we are right next door to each other, Cowboy and SNAFU. And so if you come on the central tour, you're basically getting a whole bunch of really awesome improvised comedy back to back.

And there's gonna be music in both pieces, baby.

And a nice breeze off the water.

Just before you go, I wanna give you an opportunity. If people listening to the show want to follow SNAFU and Cowboy, where can they find you?

You can follow SNAFU on Instagram @SNAFUdance. You can also find us on Facebook, same handle. You can subscribe to our mailing list, which you can find on our website, SNAFUdance.com. And yeah, you can also see Ingrid at the Winnipeg and Edmonton Fringe this year, doing her show, "Ingies Fingies."

To catch anything Cowboy related, you can find us on Instagram @cowboy.ca. And we also have a show at the end of August in the Fringe Festival. So look out for Ciaran and Islay make coffee as well.

Great, fantastic. Thank you so much for joining us.

(upbeat music)

Thank you for tuning in to this episode of "SKAMnanigans." Don't turn that dial 'cause we have another SKAMPede preview ready for your transceiver on the airwaves next Thursday. Hearing from even more artists ready to dazzle you on the Galloping Goose Trail. Until then, you've been listening to "SKAMnanigans" on 84.9 SKAM, broadcasting from Studio 846 in beautiful downtown Victoria, British Columbia.

(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. "SKAMnigans" is hosted by me, Branden Sugden. Our producer is Logan Swain. Special thanks to our guests, Kathleen Greenfield, Jeni Luther, and Lauren Ball of SNAFU Society of Unexpected Spectacles, as well as Islay McKechnie of Cowboy. Our marketing materials and graphics are by Janine Rzeplinski. We would like to acknowledge the support of our operational funders, the BC Arts Council, the Capital Regional District, and the City of Victoria for their support of Theatre SKAM. "SKAMnigans" 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, [SKAM.ca/podcast](http://SKAM.ca/podcast). Thank you so much for listening.

(upbeat music)