

SKAMnanigans S1E9 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.

(upbeat music)

If you've spent any time downtown this week, you've likely noticed purple banners strewn about the light poles of the city. You may also have noticed comics, magicians, dancers, and musicians filling the pubs. This is a sure sign that our friends at Intrepid Theater are hard at work and the Victoria Fringe is about to begin.

Fringe is the ultimate high wire act for any performer. For the audience, the thrill of seeing daring artists take the city by storm is a classic end to Victoria's summer arts programming. This week and next, we will get a taste of what Fringe has in store for Victoria this year.

Starting with the Lighter Touch Art Collective. Making the trek from Ottawa all the way to our very own SKAM satellite studio, Sarah Ivanko and Eric Karklins are here to warm your heart through Latvian folklore and talk about their collective approach to creating intimate, vulnerable stories that resonate with all of us.

(upbeat music)

Hi, Eric and Sarah, and thank you for joining us on "SKAMnanigans."

- Thank you so much for having us.

You are both part of the Lighter Touch Art Collective, the two co-founders and co-artistic directors. So my first question for you both is, how did you two come to meet each other and form this artistic collective?

Well, we started out just being friends, common circles, and then the opportunity for Sarah to do a burlesque performance came up. And the first real instance of the Lighter Touch Art Collective was Sarah opened up their creative process with me and let me in on the hard part where you're trying things and you don't want to show people, but we had that vulnerability and worked and choreographed together. Sarah had an incredible performance afterwards, so we had a welcoming response and thought, "Hey, maybe we should keep doing this."

Yeah, that sums it up.

That sounds kind of how a lot of collectives I've encountered in my own life have started, of just finding someone that you click with and someone that you trust to be able to get to that vulnerable place. And so you talk about the vulnerability. What is something else in your artistic practices that really brings you both together and that makes you such a great pair?

I think for us, having a kind of core value of really looking at art as a collective as itself and making sure that all our creations are kind of that collective creation was a big thing for us, especially because one of our main mandates with this collective is to build community. We want to be able to work with other folks, either within the Ottawa community where we are or nationally, like going and meeting a bunch of artists through Fringe and stuff like that. I would say that collective creation piece is a big thing for us.

Yeah, we've been talking to a lot of people who are sort of ditching the, what we would call the factory theatre model, starting with a script and then developing it sort of the old-fashioned way with a box set and all that. And it tends to generate some really much more interesting and thought-provoking art that maybe, I think, explores grey areas a little bit better than the traditional model can.

I think also being able to do more of that devised theatre process really let us and other collectives I've worked with really let us speak to our own experience better than maybe some more traditional theatre models, which has been really, really nice and has allowed me to explore myself more as an artist than just generally a person.

So the Lighter Touch Art Collective has been very busy this summer. From what I could see on the internet, you just wrapped up the show that went to Kingston Fringe and Ottawa Fringe, Christian Slutt, and you've published the first issue of Zine Rack. And then you're coming out here to the West Coast with your show "When Fern Flowers Bloom," which is coming to Victoria Fringe and also the Vancouver Fringe. So my question is, how do you do it? Do you have any tips for juggling so many projects in a relatively short period of time?

A big thing was supporting one another in this. There's times when I was in Kingston, I was doing it separately since I had Sarah's help during Ottawa Fringe building it. And then Sarah was able to help do some of the prep work for going out West. And when Sarah was doing work with another collective, I was doing prep work for other things. And it's making sure we communicate what the needs are and then asking each other, "Okay, what are we capable of?" Then also just riding the excitement.

Yeah, for sure. And I think, 'cause Eric and I know each other so well, it's easy to know what each other's strength and weaknesses are, especially in any of that prep or performing aspects, and help balance each other out in those ways.

So you're doing the two different shows, and I just noticed that the one show's doing both fringes in Ontario and the other, both on the West Coast. And I'm just curious if there was a specific reason behind that choice, or is that just sort of the way things shook out?

I think it's just kind of the way things shook out, to be honest. When it was at Ottawa Fringe, I was also performing in a different show. So I couldn't perform in two, but I helped stage manage in Ottawa. And then Kingston Fringe happened to be right after Winnipeg Fringe, and I had just got back from that, and I was tired and needed a break. And then timing-wise for Victoria and Vancouver, we knew that we were both gonna be available to do something, and we both really wanted to do a performance together. So we wrote this play for that.

I applaud you so much for recognizing and actually allowing yourself to take that break, because as artists, we have a bit of a tendency to run ourselves into the ground whenever we're given the opportunity to do so. So huge ups for being honest with yourself on that front. So speaking of your show, "When Fern Flowers Bloom," I'm curious, just how did the idea for the show come about?

The original idea for the play kind of stemmed from actually a 24-hour playwriting contest that Toronto Fringe was holding. We got together one weekend, we're like, "Yeah, let's write something, why not?" And so we had this idea of playing with the idea of death as a character and kind of like trying to think of a more interesting perspective to take that character. Eric is Latvian, and this show is really, really based in a lot of Latvian culture and folklore and stuff like that. So we combined those two sort of ideas to get the idea for the play.

It started out a real simple play. It was 10 minutes maybe, and it felt really good, and it moved us. So then it was like, "Oh, this has something to it. We can build upon this." And we had that excitement with each other. It was enjoying the creative process, enjoying the work that we made, and then wanting to do more together.

That's the way to do it, to start with something small and then yeah, suss out the vibe, right? Like, does this have legs and can we build more on it? I'm just curious a little bit more about also your both your backgrounds in performing and being like professional artists, essentially. Sarah, I know you have a Bachelor of Science in neuroscience and biology, and you were working in biomedical research. Like, how do you make the leap of faith to being a freelance multidisciplinary artist?

That's a great question. At the end of 2023, I made the jump to go from, I wasn't actually doing science at this job. They are not for profit, but I was leading some portfolios, whatever. But for the year leading up to that, in 2023, I had started doing more and more theater. It was always a real big passion of mine since I was like a child, I'd loved performing. And I was starting to make good headway with some collectives here and just like really, really enjoying the experience. And I had saved up enough money over the years that I was like, you know what? I can take a year off comfortably and just do art. And it was probably the best decision I ever made. So starting like January 1st, 2024, this is my job now. And I've had such an amazing experience doing other theatre projects, working with Eric, publishing my very first like zine project. It has been great. It's very scary to leave, I guess that sort of financial stability behind, but I think it has shown me really how I wanna be living my life creatively and like how I wanna be like focused more on my art and going back to if I wanna take on more part-time or full-time work, making sure it's like arts focused. It's always been a passion. And I said, you know what? I'm gonna make it a reality.

And for yourself, Eric, how do you come to the world of an arts career and what do you love about it?

I came to it very slowly. It was a war of attrition to get here. I lived a weird life. I graduated from a Bible college, but then stopped being religious. So I was just kind of topsy-turvy, figuring it out one step at a time. And it took a fair number of years of working with like social work organisations until finally after pandemic stuff and I started working in like IT cybersecurity. And it was, I just had enough of postponing the passionate side of me. When I told my best friend that I was gonna pursue art full-time, they were like, "Oh, it's about time. Like, I'm so happy for you." So it took effort, it took savings, but it is so much more freeing. And even if it doesn't pan out of being able to do it full-time for, I hope it's a long time, but I won't regret taking the time to create art, make connections, meet other artists, meet audience members, make that human connection through art that feels so good.

Yeah, and like you sort of both touched on, there's definitely a healthy dose of fear that comes with pursuing a career in the arts. And there's an even healthier dose of fear when it comes to taking the stage at Fringe. So just to sort of touch back on your show again, could you tell our audience a little bit just about what they can expect to see when they come to the SKAM Satellite Studio and see "When Fern Flowers Bloom"?

Well, what you can expect to see is a romantic, silly, sad, and very sweet play that blends traditional Latvian folklore, poetry, and symbolism smoothly, and at the same time in a new way. Latvia is a tiny, tiny little country in Eastern Europe, and it has a beautiful history that has been passed on through art, song, and dance. So seeing the traditions of Latvians in a personified way, and also in a cute, sad way, has been a joy to make and hopefully a joy to watch.

Fantastic. Well, we're so glad to have you in our venue at The Fringe, and I can't wait to meet you both when you're here in Victoria.

Yeah, that'll be great. Super excited.

I love that.

Thank you so much for coming on SKAMnigans.

(upbeat music)

When Fern Flowers Bloom plays at Fringe Venue 4, the SKAM Satellite Studio at 849 Fort Street, August 23rd to September 1st. You can follow the Lighter Touch Art Collective on Instagram @TheLighterTouchCollective.

(upbeat music)

Local performer Dave Morris is a lot of things, a real renaissance man of Victoria's arts community. You've likely seen him around because this man is everywhere and has given a lot to this community, particularly in the improv scene. This week, we managed to wrangle him into the studio to talk about his show, 52 Stories. Dave, thank you so much for coming on SKAMnigans.

(upbeat music)

Thanks so much for having me on SKAMnigans. Nice to be here.

So just as a little bit of an introduction for our listeners who maybe aren't familiar with your work, you are the Artistic Director of Paper Street Theater. You are an improviser, a teacher, a public speaker, and producer. Is there anything I've missed there?

Yeah, I'm a storyteller, a magician, and currently I'm a videogame designer as well. I do a lot of different things. I do anything creative that I can express myself with.

You're living my dream. That's amazing.

Yeah, your dream is poverty, but it's a lot of fun. But yeah, mostly people will know me as an improviser. I run the Paper Street Theater Company here in Victoria. So I've been producing improv shows in town for about 13 years now. 2011 we started, so yeah, plenty of seasons of very different, very experimental, some funny, some dramatic, some tragic improv shows. And that's where most people would know me from.

So you clearly have a lot of experience with the local art scene here in Victoria. And I'm curious, what's something that you love about our art scene here?

The art scene in Victoria? I love the, like I remember when I moved here. So I moved here from Vancouver and found all these different little arts communities, but there's a lot of overlap between all of them. And I love that, 'cause it's got that small town feel still. Even though Victoria has been growing and growing and become more of a city, there's still like, I did a lot of spoken word poetry when I first moved here. So I was in the poetry community and I do magic. So I was in the magic community and the theatre community, but then all of these people sort of jump between these different communities. And I love that kind of mix that happens between them.

Sort of on a similar note, what's a dream that you have for the future of the Victoria performing arts scene?

Well, I'm pretty excited of rumors I am hearing of an arts hub type venue that's coming soon, maybe. I don't know, the rumours of an arts hub, that excites me a lot. So places where more performance opportunities for artists, 'cause I know space is always the limiting factor for so much art that gets made. So I think having more space and more opportunities is a really great thing. So I'm looking forward to that coming soon.

Talked a lot with people actually on the podcast about not just the availability of space, but how to make space affordable. Sort of a chicken and egg situation of running a venue costs a lot of money and people don't have a lot of money in order to be able to rent the venue.

Well, that is something where I would say theatre SKAM is a part of that wonderful thing, how by providing space for people at an affordable cost. And I know Intrepid Theater does a pretty good job of that too with their studio space, which is what normally like Paper Street, that's what we operate out of a lot is their studio space, their little 50 seat black box. So there's a lot of great companies that are doing that and the more the merrier.

As we've talked about, obviously you have a background in improv and I'm curious how you use those skills when you're working on scripted kind of work.

Yeah, so the show I'm doing in the Fringe this year, 52 Stories, is a storytelling show. So I've got the stories are prepared, like I have them, I know them. But the way the show works, and people who are listening probably have no idea, is it's a memory palace show. So what I do is I shuffle a deck of cards and then I memorise the deck of cards and then I recite the order while telling stories that help me remember the cards, right? So the lovely thing is that some of the cards have stories attached to

them. So like the three of hearts is my son, the nine of hearts is my wife, the eight of hearts is my uncle, the king of hearts is my dad. And as those cards come up, I tell those stories. So it's kind of like a fun little storytelling experience. But because it's shuffled, every show comes out totally differently. So the order of the stories comes out differently and then the memory palace that I'm creating on stage as I explain how I do the show is different every time. So I am improvising those parts of the show. So even though the stories are prepared, the show and the flow of it is totally different. And so the connections that kind of pop up between things is different. The pictures and images that I have to create on stage are different every time. So some nights I'm having to figure out how I'm going to be Gandalf the Gray, you know, juggling turtles or something. And so I have to show people this Gandalf the Gray juggling turtles image, which I've never practiced. So I'm improvising these physical gestures, as well as improvising this little, finding the little moments within those physicalities that bring joy and find some comedy. 'Cause a lot of the stories are a little more real. So it's nice to have those little lighthearted moments. So this show, even though it's not improvised, has a lot of improv in it. Like I was tempted when I was applying for the fringe to click improv, 'cause so much of it is different every night. And so like, if you came to see the show two nights, it would be a different experience. But it is, it's only in those little, that structure is improvised, whereas the stories are not. So, yeah.

So when you're doing a solo show, then do you sort of consider the audience to be your scene partner?

100%, yeah. So I have a phrase I like to use where I say, keep the audience in your head with you. So whenever I'm on stage, the audience is in my brain. And I know roughly where certain people are sitting in the audience. Like where's the, if there's like a birthday party all together, or if there's like a dude and his mom, or there's like some older fringe goes in the back. Like I have them all kind of in my head. And if I get to a moment that I know is gonna appeal to that kind of person, I'll maybe accentuate it, 'cause I know where they're sitting, or I know they're there. So if I know it's an audience, like the broad example would be, if you're sitting in front of an audience full of children, you're gonna act differently on stage, 'cause you know they're all children. And if they're all seniors, you're gonna act different, 'cause you know they're all seniors. But if there's like a mix, it's trying to find those things where it's like, well this would be a good moment for the kids, this would be a good moment for the older people, this would be a good moment for those teenagers that are stoned sitting in stage left. And like bringing those moments out, even though if it was a room full of children, I wouldn't make that joke. But because there are teenagers, I will make that joke. So you're always kind of reflecting what's happening in the audience on stage.

That amount of freedom must be really nice. I guess that's the best part about working on shows that you write yourself. You have the authority to go off script a little bit if you feel it in the moment.

Totally, yeah. And like with this show too, because the way the deck is arranged, it's shuffled, but every card has a character associated with it. So depending on the show, I might bring up more characters more prominently. Like if, you know, I might reference Leonardo the Ninja Turtle, who's in my deck of cards here, might come up more if it's a younger crowd. But if it's not a younger crowd, I'll just be like, "It's a Ninja Turtle, ignore it." Because they don't know what that is. So like, depending on who's in the crowd, depends on what cards I might bring up or what stories I might mention a little bit.

As we've sort of talked about before, you have a lot of experience working with a lot of different audiences in different contexts too, like when it comes to public speaking versus something like "The Fringe." And in doing research for this episode, I watched your TED Talk, your TEDx Talk, and you talked about how improv is all about play. And that really struck with me because I feel like "The Fringe" is all about play as well. And so I'm curious if you could talk a little bit about how you might approach a "Fringe" show perhaps differently than a regular show, or do you approach them differently?

Yeah, no, that's a good question. Like the, like there's something with different audiences, like again, having performed in front of different crowds in different places, where every audience is different and unique and they're their own audience and have their own kinds of people. But at the same time, every audience is the same, right? People are pretty similar, we're more similar than different. So like, we all want similar things. We all do like to laugh sometimes and we do like to feel moved sometimes and we do like all these things. So when approaching a show, it's like keeping in mind what it is that humans need from a show. If you ask them what they want from an improv show, most people will tell you they want to laugh. That's what they think they want. But that's not just what they want. They would want to laugh, but there's so many other things that come with watching anything that you want. You want a good story, you want to root for a hero, you want to feel like nervous when they're in trouble. All of those things are still true. So like when approaching any show, you kind of want to approach it from that angle. Like what am I giving the audience from this show and what experience in their journey am I taking them on? And so all of that stuff sort of still stays the same. I think the one difference with a fringe show is that it's like the amount of risk you want to take can really go up. So like, if you want to do a show where you're just totally naked and painting a painting live in front of the audience, talking about your childhood trauma, that's something you could do in the fringe. You could do that in the fringe and no one's going to show up and be like, I didn't expect that. Because it's the fringe and it's sort of meant to be the sort of edges of theatre, or it's allowed to be the edges of theatre.

I shouldn't say meant to be, but it's allowed to be. So that's one thing with a fringe show where it's like, let's take some risks. Let's play around a little more. Let's be a little riskier or take some chances on things that we don't know if it's going to work. Which I didn't quite do with this show because I've done this show before. So it's not like a brand new total risk-taking nude me. I'm not naked on stage, everybody. But I could be, you never know. But yeah, so I think with fringe it is sort of taking those chances that makes it so much fun.

How long does it take you to write a show that has 52 different stories or 52 characters in it?

Yeah, I mean, this show, again, I don't tell 52 stories in the show because that would be impossible. I tell as many as I can. But I think there's about maybe like seven stories that actually come out per show. Yeah, how long does it take to write a show? I think it totally changes every time you're writing a show. Like some shows you can just sit and write the whole show. Like some of the stories I tell I wrote once or I told live in front of an audience for the first time ever and it worked and then I've just kept that story. And other stories I've been working on nonstop for like three years that I just keep changing them. I keep pulling things out, I keep putting things in, I keep messing around with them. So it really is so variable on so many different things. Like one of the stories, I tell a story about my grandmother and how she immigrated from, well it was like a refugee immigrant from the Middle East. And that story, the first time I told it, it was in the context of how I don't like camping. And I told my grandmother's immigration story to sort of push that point forward. And it worked really well, but it doesn't fit in this show. So I've played with it more and then it was like about, yeah like braving the elements and then it was about like hard working and now it's sort of found itself in this like, like when I'm having a bad day, I think about my grandmother and it brings me joy. And that sort of like where the frame of that story came from. But it took a while to get there and went through many different interpretations and all of them were good. Like there's one story, like the story of my wife that I tell of us getting engaged actually isn't in the show anymore 'cause it doesn't really fit with all the other stories. But she's still in the deck, but I never bring it up 'cause it's too romantic of a story, doesn't really fit the theme. But that story, like I told it, I kind of improvised it once in a show where we were drinking on stage and telling stories and I just told my engagement story and it was like, that's a good story. And then I've told it almost the same ever since. So like, yeah, it really depends.

So you've got a deck of cards here.

I do.

I'm not 100% sure how well this is gonna go for the people listening, but do you think you could do a trick for me or tell a story?

Tell a story or do a trick? Sure, well, how about, you know what I can, I'm gonna kind of teach you a little bit on how to memorise a deck of cards.

Sure, please.

Does that work? So I'm shuffling them up right now, everyone. You can hear me shuffling them. And I'm just gonna take out the top three cards, which are, okay, can you see what those cards are? It's the Jack of Spades, the Nine of Diamonds, and the Seven of Hearts, okay? Now, to me, what I see here is I see Harry Potter, okay? And then I see my ex-girlfriend from high school, my high school sweetheart, and then I see my cousin. Those are the three people that these cards represent. And then what I do is I turn it into a little picture or story. I chunk these three cards together. So instead of seeing Jack of Spades, the Nine of Diamonds, Seven of Hearts, I see Harry Potter doing a hip hop dance, but he's holding science beakers, okay? So if you can imagine that, if you can imagine in your mind a picture Harry Potter doing like an old school hip hop dance, like a high school dancer would learn how to do, but in their hands, in Harry Potter's hands, are these like science beakers. Then you've got a picture, and a picture's a lot easier to remember than just Jack of Spades, Nine of Diamonds, Seven of Hearts, right? So you encode the difficult thing into an easy thing. It's hard to remember numbers. It's easy to remember picture. Can you remember the picture? What was it?

The picture was Harry Potter doing an old school hip hop dance with beakers in his hands.

Yeah, cool, and now I want you to imagine that he's doing that at the door to the studio right there. So we're gonna put him in a memory panel. So look at the door, and in the doorway is Harry Potter doing a hip hop dance with beakers. And now in that corner, we're gonna put the other three cards, which is the Queen of Clubs, the Ten of Diamonds, and the Nine of Spades. So this is my friend Amanda, my friend Mandy, or her Mandy, and she's doing a PowerPoint presentation, but she has a whip in her hands. Okay, so I want you to picture, I mean, you don't know my friend Mandy, so picture your own friend Mandy. Do you have a friend named Mandy? Picture a friend of yours doing a PowerPoint presentation with like a clicker, except there's a whip instead of a clicker, and they're whipping the whip, and that's making the slides change. So what's that picture? What is it?

That's Mandy giving a PowerPoint presentation with a whip.

Yeah, and then what was the first one again?

That's Harry Potter doing an old school hip hop dance with beakers in his hands.

Yeah, there you go, you got it, cool. And then we'll do one more, and then we'll stop, 'cause we could do the whole deck like this, but it takes a long time. So now right here where you're sitting in your chair, we're gonna imagine, this is the Four of Diamonds, the Eight of Spades, and the Jack of Diamonds. So this turns into my friend Aaron, and then this is Frankenstein's monster, and then the Jack of Diamonds is Michael Jackson. So what we're gonna imagine is my friend Aaron is electrocuting Michael Jackson's glove. So imagine Michael Jackson's glove is sort of laid over your chair, and it's got these wires connected to it, and then my friend Aaron is pulling a lever that's sending electricity into it. So those pictures are Harry Potter doing a hip hop dance with beakers in his hands, right? Mandy is doing a PowerPoint presentation with a whip in her hand, and Michael Jackson's glove's getting electrocuted by my friend Aaron pulling a lever. And so that's the three pictures, and those pictures are much easier to remember. They're in my head, are they in your head?

Yeah.

Do you have 'em there?

Yeah.

You can remember them? Later today you'll be able to picture what are they, and you'll remember them, 'cause pictures stay in our minds so much more than words. And then we just have to decode it, and then we can quickly list that it's the Jack of Spades, right? So it's the Jack of Spades, the Nine of Diamonds, the Seven of Hearts, and then what do we got over here? We've got the Queen of Clubs, the Ten of Diamonds, the Nine of Spades, and then over here we have the Four of Diamonds, the Eight of Spades, and Michael Jackson, the Jack of Diamonds. And we get through the whole deck. So that's basically how you build a little memory palace of weird pictures around a deck of cards. And so I do that in the show. So I memorise the deck at the beginning of the show in about three minutes, and then I go around the stage and tell people where all these pictures are, and build these things up. And then when we hit a story, I jump into that story. Yeah.

Wow.

Yeah, it's a fun little show. So there you go. What were the pictures, do you remember them?

Yeah, so it's Harry Potter, hip-hop dancing with beakers in his hands, Mandy giving a PowerPoint with a whip instead of a clicker, and Michael Jackson's glove being electrocuted by your friend Aaron.

Yeah, and you're a friend of Aaron. Everyone's friend of Aaron.

Yeah.

Yeah, and there you go. And so you just do that with the whole deck of cards. So you just memorise nine cards. Not bad.

Fantastic. I can't wait to see the show.

Yeah, it's a really fun show, yeah. It's one of the shows I'm pretty proud of right now, and hope to take it further in the future. It's one of the next things I wanna do with the next chapter in my life.

Is there any kind of shout-outs you wanna do for our audience before we go?

No, all I would say is, yeah, check out as many Fringe shows as you can. The Fringe is a really fun chance to go see some new theatre that's being worked on by a truly independent artist. So I say, please come see my show, 52 Stories, but I would also say go see, go see Brain Machine by Andrew Bailey, a wonderful friend of mine, so go check out his show. Go check out, I've heard wonderful things about multiple organisms, which is coming, which seems like a really fun kind of, that's an excellent example of a Fringe show, on the Fringe, and really cool, so please check that out. And Jimmy Hogg's in town again, which is really fun. He stayed at my house like 15 years ago, so I'm excited to have him back. A lot of great shows, so please, go see as many as you can, yeah, go see as many as you can.

Fantastic, thanks so much for coming on the show.

Thanks for having me.

(upbeat music)

52 Stories by Dave Morris plays at Fringe Venue 3, the Bauman Center, August 22nd to 31st. You can check out more of Dave's work at paperstreettheatre.ca and his personal website, DaveMorris.tv. Next up, we have an interview with Hamilton, Ontario-based musician, artist, writer, and performer, Tor Lukasik-Foss, who comes to Victoria Fringe with a show about middle age and obsession with synth, in New Wave, Your Behavior.

(upbeat music)

Thank you, Tor, for joining us on SKAMnigans.

It's a pleasure to be here.

So, Tor, you have a background as a visual artist and a musician, and you've sort of transitioned to theatre kind of recently. Can you give our audience a little bit of an idea of what your background, sort of career, has been in music and art?

Sure, so I went to university and got an English and history degree, which by the time I got it, I was completely disinterested in building off it in any way, shape, or form. So I literally just sort of hit the ground. I'd always been a visual artist, so I'd always been, I'd always made visual art, so I just started by getting involved in local arts, local contemporary arts. I became part of an artist-run centre in Hamilton called the Hamilton Artist, Inc., which had a big effect on my understanding of art and arts work and stuff. And during that time, I was also an aspiring songwriter. So, yeah, I just sort of scrapped it out as a kind of unsigned, obscure, you know, cultural entity. I was making kind of contemporary installation art at the same time I was writing these sort of weirdo, burlesque kind of pop music, Tom Waits meets Talking Heads kind of mashup art songs, for want of a better word, you know, self-releasing CDs, getting the odd contemporary art show. I was doing that as a career. There was never any income in it. I could never get it to the point where I was self-sufficient beyond, say, maybe like a 12-month stretch where, you know, a grant would come in and I'd get a couple of commissions or something like that. So I've always then sort of ballasted that career with work in the arts admin sector. So I've done like community outreach for art galleries. I've done arts writing. The last job that I had was as the director of programs and education at the Art Gallery of Hamilton. So I've had a kind of mixed bag, and I've always kept my toe firmly in performance and contemporary art. It was when I took the job at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, 'cause it was a fairly sort of intensive arts admin job, I was running a department, it's a fairly big gallery, you know, with a fairly heavy mandate, suddenly I didn't have time really to like do concerts as a musician or think about recording and releasing. And then in terms of the visual work, I had to really reduce what I was doing in that regard too. And so I thought, "Well, if I'm gonna survive this arts admin job, I need something." And what I did is I joined a storytelling collective. There was a new one in Hamilton, it's called the Hamilton Seven. It was organised by this amazing multifaceted artist, dancer, theatre maker named Lisa Pijuan-Namura. She had recently relocated from Toronto to Hamilton. And she wanted to get people who were conversant in all these different creative disciplines, but who saw storytelling as an element in their art or art making. And so she set up this structure where we would meet, we would come up with story ideas, we would have these monthly events at a small theatre and then make ourselves better storytellers. To me, it was fascinating. It fit well within the sort of time that I had outside my job to pursue. It kind of, I guess, was like a tiny foot into the world of theatre, I guess, like theatre or theatre making. It was the beginning of that, what does it mean to tell a story on a stage kind of thing, which I'd never considered it before. Anyway, I really took to it. I was chugging along quite nicely with it. The Hamilton Seven started to have some real success in the city. So we started to think about, oh, we should do like a greatest hits and bring it to Hamilton Fringe, which we did. And then suddenly I was getting a taste of what Fringe Festivals were. And it

was all very, very modest. And then in 2022, we're coming out of the pandemic. It was an incredibly stressful time in the job that I was doing, 'cause we had to keep our gallery really sort of in the public eye at a time when the gallery itself was closed. So like programs and online delivery of educational assets was like a big part of what the art gallery was doing. Anyway, I came out of the pandemic fully stressed and then my mother dies suddenly. And then I start to just have this grief soaked burnout period where, and then it was a full on existential crisis. You know, I had to go see a counsellor. I had to re-ask myself, what do I wanna do with my life? Am I doing what I wanna do with my life? And sort of the answer that came up was like, no, I need to make more space for creative work. You know, and I guess out of all of that turmoil in 2022, the first thing I started to do is to tell stories about what I was going through. And then I found like that was really thrilling. And then kind of from that, the seed of this show that I'm bringing to Victoria emerges, right? New Wave Your Behaviour is basically a story about going to see a counsellor during a time of upheaval. And then weirdly, weirdly falling back into like a kind of deep obsession with this like early 80s synth pop at the same time. And felt very incongruous as I was going through those things, but then there was this kind of thing or this revelation I had where I realised that like, my crisis as a middle-aged man was very much connected to this synth pop music of my youth. It was funny to me. I developed it into a story. That story ended up kind of having legs. I got connected to an amazing theatre director named Marlo Nunez, who helped sort of dramaturge and direct it into the show that I have now. So it was, that's kind of the art, you know? I burned out of my job and then suddenly I'm making theatre and you know, there you go. And it's kind of, you know, it was never fully intentional. It just, it almost, it was like a path that revealed itself. So that's my long-winded answer.

Yeah, I think a lot of people sort of describe it that way where they don't necessarily get into the arts in general necessarily on purpose or with a specific goal in mind, but then sort of end up finding themselves. I like to talk about like clicking into the grid, like the grid just chose this path for you. And now you're kind of...

Creative work. And really it encourages creative work. It encourages people. And if I were being completely honest, like I think before this, I had a kind of, you know, maybe like naive dismissive kind of attitude about what fringes were. 'Cause I, you know, I'd see the odd fringe show and if it was bad, I would like think, oh, fringe is dumb, you know? And I think what I'm really grateful for is understanding like truly that fringe is very much the same as like an artist run center, right? There is this architecture that really supports like creative work and really encourages creative work. It encourages people fully to take as big a risk as they're willing to take with that work, right? And do it in a framework that's not like a capitalist framework. It's just about like the veracity of the, and the purity and the honesty of the artwork.

100%, yeah. Find fringe brings in the types of shows that like don't work anywhere else. And I find that really, really exciting that like people can do shows that don't

necessarily have that like commercial appeal all the time, like you were sort of talking about. So working in fringes now, I imagine you probably interact with it and encounter a lot of early career and emerging artists lately. So I'm just curious as someone who's at like the mid-career phase, what sort of similarities and differences are you seeing in this generation of early career artists and sort of the difficulties that they're encountering and like the opportunities that we have today that are different from when you were in this phase of your career?

When I was an emerging artist, you know, it was like, the internet was just like a novelty, you know? And so it's interesting to see like emergent companies now, like wield the tools of social media so sort of seamlessly within their promotion, integrate like digital tools into their storytelling, like all of that stuff to me is so amazing because I'm a Luddite, you know, with that. And it doesn't, that work doesn't come easy to me. So just to see the dexterity and then what's more surprising is that it's almost because of the ubiquity of these technological tools that I do, it does seem like there's a lot of young theatre makers and a lot of creative makers who are really, really, really embracing the tactile, the simple, the visceral, like going into, you know, shadow puppetry and very elemental ways of storytelling, like, but really clutching onto it, like seeing it in a way that I can't see because I've just taken that stuff for granted for so long, you know, that and combined with like, you know, our economy is so wrecked right now and it's so easy to be hopeless. And it's so easy to say, well, I'm gonna make this thing, but there's no hope that I'm gonna make money off of it or I'm gonna build it towards any kind of real sustainability, like as dire as that is, it also gives you a bravado, like you've got nothing to lose now by taking the biggest risk you can or speaking as flat out honestly as you're capable of. I am really, really, really sort of humbled and impressed by the degree of like flat out honesty that I'm seeing from a lot of very young creative makers. And that's an honesty that I did not have when I was young. Like I was a hundred percent like bullshitting my way through being an artist, right? Trying to be smarter than I was, trying to be more emotionally stable than I was, like all of that. And to watch young theatre makers bring all their vulnerability out and present it, knowing that it's the only true way forward, I think is like the best. I'm so amazed by that and amazed at how consistent that seems in so many of the productions that I've seen this year.

And finally, just before we wrap things up, what is your elevator pitch for new way of your behavior? If you bump into someone on the street and you need to sell them on coming to the show, what are you gonna say?

Okay, well, what I learned in Winnipeg that works is I say, does anybody know what it is? Anybody a fan of new wave, right? And then usually people don't, usually nobody admits it, right? Like the people who love new wave, they kind of, you can see it in their eyes that they love it but they don't wanna like tell their spouse that they love it. So I usually just say like, I know you have a relationship with this, like early eighties pop. Everyone's encountered it, I think at least, and you either have contempt for it or

you'd love it, but it's worthwhile just hearing me out on it because new wave of your behaviour is this kind of love letter to early eighties synth pop. It's the music that formed me when I was young and it came barreling back into my life in middle age in ways that were utterly transformative. And if you think you know the genre, I don't think you know the genre until you've seen this show. 'Cause I will break it apart and show it back to you in ways that you are not ready for.

Thank you so much for joining us on SKAMnigans Tour. It's been really fantastic having you and I can't wait to see you in Victoria.

I'm so happy I got to do this. I've had a great conversation with you guys. Yeah, have me back anytime.

We would certainly be happy to have you back. Thanks so much. New wave your behaviour plays at Fringe Venue 3, the Bauman Center, August 23rd to September 1st. Showtimes for all the artists we spoke to this week, as well as the rest of the Fringe Festival can be found online at victoriafringe.com. You can also swing by Intrepid Theater's box office at 1609 Blanshard Street between noon and 5 p.m. to pick up a printed Fringe Guide if hard copies are more your style. We'll be back next week with even more fringe artists to talk to, so make sure you are subscribed to SKAMnigans and have notifications turned on. You don't wanna miss it. Now before we go, we'll leave you with a piece of music from New Wave Your Behaviour. This is Dissociation by Tor Lukasik-Foss. ♪ Information ♪ ♪ Without emotion ♪ ♪ May be a symptom ♪ ♪ Of dissociation ♪ ♪ The opposite of panicking ♪ ♪ The episodes are quickening ♪ ♪ It's bringing on a reckoning ♪ ♪ Dissociation ♪

(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, Sarah Ivanko, Eric Karklins, Dave Morris, and Tor Lukasik-Foss. Our marketing materials and graphics are by Janine Joplinski. 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. Thank you so much for listening.

(upbeat music)