

SKAMnanigans S1E13 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.

- Hello and welcome to "SKAMnanigans," the theatre SKAM podcast. So if you're listening to this and you're hearing traffic noises or a really sick beat coming from across the street, that would be because I may or may not be walking down Fort Street right now on my way to the SKAM satellite studio. Why am I not in our immaculately padded recording studio like I normally am? Well, you see, dear listener, Logan, our producer, is currently on a hunting trip right now. But we've got the SKAM satellite series coming up and I really wanted to get a podcast episode out in time for the satellite series. So I managed to find the microphone and now I am going rogue and making an episode all of my own that I will make Logan edit when he gets back from his vacation. And here I am now pulling up to the SKAM satellite studio to interview Cowboy for their show. Hi guys, welcome back to the podcast.

- Hello, Branden.

- Hello.

- Yeah, so welcome back to not only "SKAMnanigans," but to the SKAM satellite studio. We're so grateful to have you back on the stage and being part of the SKAM satellite series.

- Yeah.

- Yeah.

- Yeah, we're so excited.

- Yeah, we're stoked. (all laughing)

- So I just wanna ask, what is "The Seagull" all about?

- "The Seagull" is about...

- Well, it's about a seagull named Ghi.

- And he has depression. He thinks things aren't going to get better for him. And who knows, will they? I don't know. You gotta come find out. But yeah, it's about a seagull with mental health issues. (all laughing)

- Relatable.

- For context, Islay isn't in costume except for a full face of makeup. It's seagull makeup. (all laughing)

- I don't have anything else to say about that. (laughs)

- It's true.

- Yeah. (all laughing) Okay, maybe I'll give it a shot.

- Give it a go.

- I'll give my elevator pitch of "The Seagull."

- For the love of God, please.

- "The Seagull" is about a bird named Ghi who's suffering from mental illness and he thinks this is gonna be the last day of his life. And so he's making some bids to the audience and bids to some important people in his life to see if he can maintain any sense of connection with the world. Will he?

- You'll just have to find out.

- Buy your tickets at SKAM.ca. Fantastic. Well, I think that's a wrap. We're good. (all laughing)

- Okay, goodbye.

- So what I'm curious, like the most recent thing that you've done or the most recent thing that you both worked on for "SKAM" would have been "SKAMpede" and then more recently you were "In the Fringe" with Ciaran and Ayla make coffee. So what I'm curious about is how do you approach making a show in a theatre differently from a show that's being made in like a borrowed space or like a site-specific show like being outdoors?

- Yeah, I know for me, as soon as we got in the space for tech, it felt like I could breathe again. It was like, I mean, it's really fun to do it in site-specific spaces and finding the challenges that are inherent in those spaces. But I think just because of my background and doing so much theatre inside of a theatre, it just feels so nice

and cosy. And I'm like, oh, it's like being hugged by a familiar friend. You're like, oh, okay, we got the lights, we got the sound, we're good.

- Yeah, doing two site-specific shows in a row was electric and exhilarating and a very fun artistic challenge to mine what we could from the spaces and get inspired. But it feels really nice to be in a black box theatre and to have access to a projector and all of these things that we couldn't really do outside or in a coffee shop. So it feels like a real treat.

- I mean, we could have done it with some crazy engineering, perhaps.

- That's true.

- I think Fast Bus could have used a projector for sure.

- Yeah, that's so true.

- Don't we all want a projector in every show?

- Always.

- All the time.

- Yes.

- If I'm not mistaken, Islay, you're performing basically solo in this show.

- Yeah, basically solo. There's a small asterisk, but they'll see. You'll all see.

- You'll all see.

- You'll all see. I like to say vaguely threatening things.

- I would say even it's a very, very, very, very small asterisk.

- So I'm just curious, how does that change the process as opposed to a show where you're both performing in it and sort of feeding off of each other in an onstage sense rather than one of you performing and one of you being the observer?

- A friend asked me that the other day and I actually, I don't feel like it's that different to how we usually do things just because we are both co-creators of the show and Ciaran has so many ideas that are onstage with me that it does feel like he's on stage in many ways. The spirit of Ciaran Volkey is being astrally projected from the booth.

- That's why we needed the projector.

- Yes, exactly. Yeah, yeah, I would say that we, because we've worked so closely together for so long, it just doesn't feel that different even though Ciaran won't be onstage necessarily with me for this one.

- Yeah, yeah, process-wise, I think pretty similar. Honestly, it's like, I feel like with our processes, it just sort of, through sheer determination, they just happen. But it is, for me at least, it's a little bit different. I am taking a bit of more behind-the-scenes role in this one, which is kind of exciting. I'm also calling the show, which is actually not something that I've ever done before. I've taken on stage managerial roles in the past, but I've never actually had the privilege to be like, "Alex, go." And it's just, it's kind of exhilarating. It's awesome.

- Oh, the adrenaline.

- Yes.

- The power.

- Yes.

- The lights go when you say go.

- Yes.

- Or when Logan remembers and I didn't. (laughing)

- Whichever comes first.

- Yes, exactly.

- So I saw on Instagram recently that this is Cowboy's last show for the foreseeable future. Can you tell us a little bit what's up with that?

- What were your sources?

- Yes, Branden, at 2 p.m. tomorrow, I will stop all my clocks and walk eastward into the rising sun and I will never return. No, I'm moving to Germany. So kind of true, just not tomorrow at 2 p.m., but yeah, it'll be Cowboy's swan song, seagull song, but I do it for a little bit.

- For the time being.

- For the time being. We're gonna keep it going. I'm sure we'll still talk to each other. But yes, I am moving to Germany to know more things about the world, about Germany, about myself. I just gotta know what they're up to over there. Sorry, I'm emotional.

- You're saying it cryptically, but you are just, you know, you're exploring a new chapter of your life.

- Yes, exploring a new chapter.

- You're just checking out the world and I think that's awesome.

- Yes, no hidden agenda. Just checking it out. Oh, I shouldn't say this. They're gonna revoke my visa. I'm not up to anything weird in the country of Germany. Federal Republic of Germany. No, I just wanna go get into the niche alt comedy scene and get more performing arts training. Yep.

- Vivitna, yep.

- But also moving forward with immense gratitude to Ciaran and to all of the local theatre orgs in Victoria who have been so incredible and hospitable and generous. I'm smiling.

- Well, we'll be so glad to have you back when you do decide to return from Germany, whether that's on tour or coming back to live in Victoria or what have you. So you're starting to get a sense of the themes of *The Seagull*. So yeah, talking about your own morbidity is not up your alley. Well, I don't know what to tell you.

- This one's made up for you.

- Or just come anyway. You'll have a good time. I'm sure you'll have a good time.

- Check it out.

- Yeah, okay, here, maybe I'll speak on that. It's like this show, I mean, a lot of our shows, I think we've dabbled in some more serious themes, but have always been usually, hopefully comedic about it. And this one is no different, but I think, yeah, with like Guy's oncoming death, it's like, it's pretty explicit. It's visceral, but it's also, it's beautiful. And you're a wonderful performer and you do it so well. So I think that our audiences will be in for a treat.

- Let's hope so.

- Yeah.

- Comedy is the best way to tackle these difficult topics sometimes, because it allows you kind of to get in the door rather than just getting like sucker punched right off the top of the show with just depression.

- Yeah, you're not in third year doing Trojan women.

- Launching babies out of trebuchets.

- Launching babies out of trebuchets.

- That is a deep cut.

- That's a niche bit for the Phoenix students.

- For the real ones at home.

- I was in a production of the Trojan women and I didn't go to the Phoenix. I think it's a rite of passage.

- Who did you play?

- One of the girlies. One of the girlies. Yep.

- That's sick.

- Yeah, it was awesome.

- Cool.

- Were you Pelascus? Were you in it?

- Pelascus.

- Pelascus? Who were you?

- I don't know that guy, it was Menelaus. Anyway.

- Well, before I let you go and rehearse for your show, is there anything you'd like to say to our audience or anything you wanna say to someone who's thinking about coming to the Seagull?

- No.

- Logan, you have to keep that pause in. You have to keep that pause in. Great. Well, we can't wait for you to come down to the Satellite Studio this weekend and the following weekend. The Seagull closes October 27th as part of the SKAM Satellite series. Go get your tickets at SKAM.ca. Ciaran, Islay, thank you so much for joining us on SKAMnanigans.

- Thank you so much.

- Thank you so much. It's always so lovely getting to catch up with Ciaran and Islay before they do a show in the SKAM Satellite Studio. I'm just on the other side of the block now, heading up into our office so that I can interview ira Cooper from Spec Theatre. He is going to be doing his show, Everything is Super Wow, as part of the SKAM Satellite series during the same time period as Cowboy. And we can't wait to have him on the podcast again. So here is that interview.

- Again, I was expressing to Logan how much I appreciate this opportunity for Spec Theatre. Maybe this is worth sharing that we're celebrating 10 years of Spec Theatre this year. And then before that, there was tape mouth films. And then before that, there was me in a basement with a bunch of puppets. And before that, there was me at a community centre with a bunch of puppets and a ketchup packet making fake blood. But this is the first opportunity that a theatre company has approached Spec Theatre and gone, "Hey, would you like to do something as a representative theatre company in the city?" And that is such an honour. It is so big in my books. It's on the front page of a new book. It's starting a new book. It's a new novel for me. It's a new chapter. And it's such an honour because with things like the VEC closing down and all of these arts that are scrambling to find spaces amongst Peloton gyms, that the arts in a place like #YYJ really need to come together to support each other in these new ways that we can't live in our own horse racing lanes. That we need to let go of the ego of, "I'm going to make my theatre company something that it's a theatre company. It's not going to be this thing that's going to be like, "I'm going to rival blah." Not everyone can be Jimbo the drag queen. I mean, who I love so much and I'm expressing this right now in another side tangent. But I just really appreciate it. It's just a really, I just feel such gratitude and appreciation for SKAM taking a chance, taking a fringe risk with Spec Theatre. Having, I don't think y'all saw anything besides like SKAMPEDE.

- I saw Mr. Coffeehead.

- You saw Mr. Coffeehead, okay. Okay, so you have some expectations. You have some knowledge of what's going to go on. Okay, so this new show, 75% Mr. Coffeehead, 25% new, including a new song and a new puppet. The best puppet. The creme de la creme puppet. So if you saw Mr. Coffeehead, you saw Mr. Coffeehead, you're going to love everything super wow because it's like taking the

feedback. We took feedback from audiences since we've been traveling the fringe over two years with the show. We took feedback from audiences. And again, audience feedback can come in different forms. It can be like, "I hate it at all." Why? "It just sucked." And you can't really do stuff with that. But when people are specific and they give you the time of day to just sit back and be like, "I loved it." And I'm like sitting there like, "My hairs are going up on my knuckles." I have hair on my knuckles, yes. "All the hair on my knuckles is going on." I'm like, "Yeah, come on. Yeah, let me know. I really, I want that feedback." Like any sort of feedback, any sort of loop where we can build this relationship where, because I've been talking to you for like 55 minutes. If you can talk to me for even five minutes, 10 minutes and say, "I really like this. I didn't like this. I'm at your leash." It's like such an honor to hear from the audience to take their time to share with me and our group. The spec isn't just me. It's Aslam, it's Ruby. Like I write a show, but it's never me just out there on my own, even in a one-person show. Even the writing itself, we have a collaborative writing process where I'll write the initial script and then we have all the team come in and I say, "Tear it apart. Do whatever you want because," and I think I mentioned this in the last SKAMPede interview, a SKAM, yeah, the SKAMPede interview, that one person can come up with something in one second that you'd never come up with in six months and why wouldn't you use that in a show? Why wouldn't you put that out there? Why wouldn't you be like, "Hey, this is our show," rather than, "This is my show and I wrote every single word of it. I don't really get that cult of ego." That's why my name is actually spelt in the lowercase is because as somebody who's neurocentric, I like a lot of times accidentally focus on myself. Like I've been talking. I haven't even been given a question and I've just gone off onto like a one-hour monologue about who knows what. But this idea of like just shrinking yourself so that you can be part of a team. I just wanna collaborate. That's why, again, back to this, we get to collaborate. This is exciting. Even though I seemed like a grumpy pants during tech, I loved being in that space 'cause the last time I had been in that space, I saw Tree, which I love Natasha so much, also another clown. So it just like any sort of time I get to collaborate, got to collaborate with Gumbo this year and last year and the year before. Those are the most meaningful things. That's the greatest part about art 'cause dating apps are one thing, making friends in passing is another thing, but being able to collaborate with people within art, oh my goodness, that's the peanut butter to my jelly. Like, yeah, sorry for those with allergies, but like I'm a big PB and J fan. We could still be friends if you have not allergies, but I might have to go in another room sometimes. So do you have any questions? I just take it as a no. Go ahead.

- I think like the interviews that we do that are the conversational tend to be the best ones. And I think part of what makes any artist great is someone who can just talk and sort of spill their heart out into a microphone on command. So yeah, I will say thank you for coming on SKAMNanigans for the second time. I think you're our second or third returning guest now. Very exciting. And yeah, you talked a little bit about how everything is super wow sort of came out of Mr. Coffeehead. And I'm just

curious a little bit if you could just tell us in a little bit more detail maybe what's new and sort of what direction did the audience feedback take you in?

- Of course. First off, I guess I should explain Mr. Coffeehead a little bit in everything super wow. And then I can explain how it got into it. If you don't know what Mr. Coffeehead is, it's the former name of everything super wow. Mr. Coffeehead, the reason why Mr. Coffeehead, it's the name of my bicycle. Mr. Coffeehead came out of dire circumstances. Montreal Fringe Festival had been canceled for several years due to COVID. And they were starting up again and they contacted me and were like, "Hey, you were on the wait list for bring your own venue, but we've moved you up. You can now like be part of the lottery." And I was like, "Sweet, I'm in?" And they're like, "Yeah." So you've got like three days, four days to give us like the name of the show. And I was like, "Sweet, I'm gonna do "Artisanal Intelligence." That was the show we had put forward several years ago. "Let's do it." Contacted the actors. The actors were like, "Nope, we've moved on from three years or two years ago, however long it had been." And I was like, "Okay, that's totally fair." So I really wanted to be part of Montreal Fringe. So I just looked at my bicycle and wrote the name of my bicycle into the application. And that became the basis and the premise of the show, which was written up to the point of being on the airplane on my way to Montreal Fringe, freaking out writing probably a song on the plane, probably annoying the person beside me humming to myself.

So Mr. Coffeehead was done over the course of a year, sorry, over fringe season. How the fringe circuit works is it moves from Montreal West finishing in either Vancouver or Victoria. So you can go to one of the fringe festivals that go along there. And so we took Mr. Coffeehead to, I think, five cities. And then the next year I was like, "I wanna do this show again. I feel like I just figured out this show." And we had all this feedback. So a lot of the feedback was like, "We wanna see more. We want more connection with the puppets." Puppets was a big one. So puppets was on the top of the list of what people wanted to see more of. They love the two puppets. They were like, "We want more with that." And so I and the team fleshed out the puppets more. And I actually don't ever wanna do the same show again. It's really hard for me to do the same show again. And I can equate that to many things, but I get bored really quickly. So I think that also spurred the need to come up with something new, to add more. So that became a new song, became a new puppet and also just giving myself more challenges. So for example, the puppets puppeting the puppets. What does that look like? Could I make up, could we do puppet recursion where puppets are puppeting puppets? Is that possible? Could we make every prop on stage that you see a puppet? Yes, we can. And that kind of was the impetus and draw to do a revamped version, which I've never gotten to bring to Victoria. So that's why this is so wonderful, this opportunity to perform as part of the SKAM Satellite Series, aside from getting to perform with some other amazing companies. Oh my goodness, is that I get a chance to show it to the city where a lot of it was written. It was written here. I was biking around and singing the songs on

the bike lanes that are here. I took a trip up Island and did the loop from Victoria all the way up to Ferry Creek and then rode back through the center of the Island and rode back down again, trying to write the show. Wrote nothing during that period of time. Apparently cycling and also trying to write a play in a really cold tent because it was like, I don't know, March or April. Like I chose the wrong season. I always choose the wrong season. Like my first bike trip in 2010 from Vancouver to Mexico, I went, I think, also in March. Also had no idea what I was doing, where I wore like a 90-pound backpack and looked like a weird torpedo coming down the road with the Pacific Coast. But this is where this show is very grounded in. It's very grounded in the West Coast and in Lekwungen speaking territories and also the territories of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish peoples, also known as Lekwungen, also known as Vancouver. So like both of those two places, because place always inspires the show for me in whatever absurdism I'm doing, environment, place are big inspirations to it. I don't know if I answered the question, but I feel like I did somewhere within that.

- Yeah, I definitely think you did. Just talking about how can you make everything that appears on stage a puppet, like that's actually something that I sort of felt when I watched Mr. Coffeehead was like, "Oh man, I loved all the puppetry." And yeah, how can you take that just to the next step of like absurdity sort of like you're talking about. And yeah, we're really grateful to have you as part of the SKAM Satellite series. We really love artists that are doing local work that's inspired by and about Victoria and the collaborative element, as well as like very much kind of the SKAM ethos. So we're really, really glad to have you in the Satellite studio.

- Okay, so ira, if I bump into you on Douglas Street coming out of the Bay Center and I see you and I'm like, "Hey, don't you have a show at the SKAM Satellite series?" And you go, "Yes, I do. It's called 'Everything is Super Wow.' I have 30 seconds, I have to catch a bus. What are you gonna say to get me to come to the show?"

- "Everything is Super Wow" is a foot-fueled slapstick tragedy about bicycles, dreaming big, and giving up in your 30s, starring peppy puppets, original tunes, and awkwardly captivating dance moves. It was featured in fringes across the country from Montreal all the way to Vancouver with people saying things like unmissable, transcendental, and his performance is groovy. In fact, somebody handed me \$70 after one of the shows and said, "One of my favourite shows of all time." They were also in an echo machine, which made them sound like they were bigger than they were. And that's how I pitch it. It's really, it's a show about not focusing on how far you can get on the road of life, but focusing on the very road itself, getting down on your haunches and noticing the small things. It's about process over products, 'cause we're not products, we're actually a process. It's not the Tour de France. It's the Tour de Me, it's the Tour de You, it's a tour to everyone. Everyone can relate to a show about, I shouldn't say everyone. I don't know if you, I mean, you came out of the Bay Center. I don't know much about you besides that you like to do a lot of your

shopping all in one confined location. But maybe you've only gone, that's very assumptive of what you were doing in the Bay. Look how I've just changed this into, "Hey, can you make a pitch for the Bay? What can I do in there? I've never known too much about the Bay Center." Anyways, yes, so that's how I would pitch the show, minus the last part where I talked about the Bay.

- Fantastic. Yeah, we hope that all of you listening will take a tour on your bike down to the SKAM Satellite Studio. Everything is Super Wow is playing as of today until October 27th at the SKAM Satellite Studio and you can get your tickets at SKAM.ca. Thank you so much again for joining us on the podcast, ira. We're so glad to have you.

- I'm so glad that you were having me. That makes no sense, but thanks for having me.

- Well, folks, I hope that you enjoyed listening to these interviews with the artists headlining the first half of the SKAM Satellite Series as much as I did recording them. The Seagull and Everything is Super Wow will be playing at the SKAM Satellite Studio from now until October 28th. You can get your tickets at SKAM.ca. I can't wait to see you down there.

- Feeder 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, 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 Feeder 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, SKAM.ca/podcast. Thank you so much for listening.