

SKAMnanigans S2E1 Transcript

(upbeat music)

Hello and welcome to SKAMnanigans, the Theatre SKAM podcast.

SKAMnanigans brings you into the world of Theatre in Victoria, BC.

I'm your host, Branden Sugden.

Let the SKAMnanigans begin.

Hi everybody, welcome to season two of SKAMnanigans.

I'm so excited to have you all back listening to another great series of interviews with local Victoria artists as they do shows around town.

We've got some great episodes in store for you this year.

We're going to be launching them on the first Thursday of each month this year.

So keep your ears peeled for that later down the road.

Our first interview for 2025 is with Theatre Inconnu and Diana Budiachenko, the director of Queen Maeve, as well as Clayton Jevne, the artistic director of the company.

We had a really great conversation.

I can't wait to share it with you.

Hi Diana, hi Clayton.

Thank you so much for joining us on SKAMnanigans.

Yeah, no problem.

Hello, good to see you.

So Diana, you're the director for Queen Maeve, which is going to be playing at Theatre Inconnu.

And I'm curious if you can just tell me a little bit for the listeners who aren't familiar with Irish mythology. Can you tell us a little bit about Queen Maeve, like the mythological character and then Queen Maeve in the story of this play?

Okay, Queen Maeve is a mythological character.

She lived 3000 years ago.

It's actually, it hasn't been proved.

So we take her as a mythological character.

She was a super powerful woman.

She had such power that she had to approve men if they wanted to be kings.

Probably the most powerful mythological character in Ireland.

Also, Queen Maeve is associated with many things.

As a powerful woman, a warrior queen, also a sorceress, mother earth.

There are very many aspects of her.

In our play, we try to add all those elements, a bit of everything.

So she's powerful, at the same time intimidating.

And also we show her as a sorceress at some point as well.

We try to incorporate all that in our play.

It's very interesting because in the play, the play is originally not about the real Queen Maeve, right?

It's about a woman who thinks she's Queen Maeve.

And there are certain moments in the play when she sort of transforms into that character.

And we try to make that transformation very distinct.

Sometimes it's funny, sometimes it's creepy, but I think it's a perfect combination of funny and creepy.

We try to study what kind of moves or actions she could do as an Irish queen.

How she could, I don't know, pull her sword, how she would call that.

And I think we are doing great.

Yeah, that's what we are doing.

- I'm curious, I'm really fascinated about the ways that mythologies from different parts of the world can kind of interact with each other sometimes because they often have overlap.

And so I'm curious if there were any kind of ties you noticed to Ukrainian mythology or folklore or anything that you drew from in that realm to help tell this story that is rooted in Irish folklore.

- I can't think of an equivalent in Ukraine.

I'm very distinct to one, but I can definitely think of a few.

And if probably you combine those few in one person, that could be Queen Maeve.

We had very powerful women who were in church when it was Kiev Rus.

There was a very powerful woman, but it's a real character.

She was real; she was not a mythological character.

We also have famous witches, like, I mean, also folklore characters.

And I incorporated some of those witchcraft, probably witch movements into our Queen Maeve.

And in the Carpathian mountains, there are people, they actually exist right now, who believe that they can control nature in some ways.

So we try to use some of that as well.

But you are right, there are mythological characters who associate themselves with mother nature, healers, witches, warrior queens; they are everywhere.

We just don't have one that is quite like Queen Maeve.

But if you think of a few and combine them in one, it could be a Queen Maeve, yeah, for sure.

- So this is a relatively new play by Judith Thompson.

It premiered in Stratford, Ontario, in 2023.

And I'm curious, Clayton, how did Theatre Inconnu come about producing the Western Canadian premiere of this script?

- I have a previous connection with Judith in that one of the first productions we did in Market Square when we switched from being a puppet company to a live Theatre company in the early '90s was her play "Crack Walker," which was a relatively new play at the time, which really, really blew me away.

It's an incredible play.

And since then, I've also directed "Lion in the Streets," which is another amazing play.

And then I lived in Toronto for about eight months and I got to know Judith a bit then.

So when I'm trying to find a new Canadian play to do, she's kind of one of the first people I Google.

And I just came across the review of the play, this new play that she had done, and it sounded quite fascinating.

So I wrote to her and asked her if she could send me a script, which hasn't been published yet.

She actually continued to do new drafts for us in the process, and she sent it to me and seemed quite excited that we would be entertaining the idea of producing this play.

So that was another Judith Thompson play to do, which had me quite excited.

- Great, that's so cool that there's going to be, I guess, original material that wasn't seen in Stratford that'll be on the stage in Fernwood.

I'm curious, Diana, were you familiar with Judith's work before working on this show?

- No, but I had to Google her and I did my research and I started asking Theatre people.

So what I found is she's sort of famous for somewhat dark scripts.

And this one is pretty dark as well, but I think it has a good balance of being dark and at the same time hilarious.

So yeah, it's very much of a Judith Thompson play.

That's what I figured for myself.

- Yeah, yeah, she is sort of known for that.

And those are some of the plays that I love where it's like, you can swing massively from laughing your head off to like, oh my God, can you believe that?

- That's why I think that it will never be boring.

There never is a dull moment in this play because you're just blown away with what's going on.

- 100%.

I want to transition a little bit into talking about Theatre Inconnu a little bit more generally.

For those of our audience members who maybe aren't familiar with Theatre in Kanu, you guys have been around since 1987.

And I think Kanu holds a really unique position in the local Theatre ecology.

And I'm wondering, Clayton, if you can talk about what that role is in our local Theatre community.

- That might be a little tricky because it's never something that we have consciously set out to define for ourselves, or when I say us, it's me.

(laughing)

But I shouldn't really say that because we do have such a returning number of artists that there is always a feeling of ensemble quality when we do a play.

And I, yeah, it's hard.

I've avoided trying to think about the role we play, but we do, I think, satisfy a niche market in presenting plays that I think have a lot of merit, but aren't the kind of plays that would pull in a wide audience.

They're not what you might call really commercial, although in a larger center like London or Toronto or New York or Seattle, there would be a big enough audience to have these kinds of plays play in a more, like I don't want to say mainstream, but more legitimately professional company.

We're not classified as a professional company.

So in Victoria, there isn't the audience that would support a professional company doing these kinds of plays.

So we satisfy a certain part of the population who are wanting to come and see plays that are going to be, we always use the word challenging, but I don't, that's a bit of a scary word because they're not challenging in that the audience is going to have to sit there and think, okay, what kind of part of this play am I going to relate to?

Am I going to have to think really hard?

They're challenging in that they, I think they open up parts of ourselves that we're not really that, we don't access that often in terms of emotion, in terms of sort of intellectual, metaphysical thought, that sort of area, but they show us what we already know about ourselves, but maybe aren't always relating to within ourselves.

And that's the kind of plays I look for, and it seems to excite actors to be involved in those plays.

We get a lot of actors from other more community-based Theatre companies in Victoria who have told me that they really love doing the work they're doing with the other companies, but they also really love coming to Theatre Inconnu because they get to do things that they would never get to do in terms of actors with other companies in terms of finding roles that are going to stretch them and have them pull out different qualities in their own acting.

So I think we serve that niche both for the audience and for the artistic participants in that we are providing this, I'll use the word challenging, this challenging type of entertainment, but not challenging in the scary sense, but challenging in that are you willing to face these things in yourself that you didn't really know about?

That is something I've noticed about Theatre Inconnu shows.

They always have a lot for you to sort of chew on.

And I think that's what is really appealing about acting for Inconnu as well is that the roles are really meaty.

They're not just like the love interest character.

There's always, they've always got something more complicated that you kind of have to wrestle with.

And that sort of challenge is really exciting as an artist to tackle.

Diana, I wonder if you could talk about what some of those challenges were for you as an artist directing the show and maybe for the artists who worked on "Queen Maeve" with you.

- Yeah, there were many.

So there are four characters and they are all pretty intense.

So the main character, the lady who, when triggered, transforms into Queen Maeve.

And in the script, it's actually sometimes written in a way that is not very clear where exactly she transforms.

So let's say there's an older lady and then all of a sudden she turns into Queen Maeve.

The script is written in a way so that we could interpret it the way we want it.

It's great because it has room for creativity.

We had to find out what exactly would trigger a person, what action to kind of lose yourself and transform into a different world.

To not wanting to hear something, to not wanting to be here.

What would that be?

So we were searching for those indicators in the script.

That's what it is for the main character.

Also, she is full of very interesting emotions and very complicated feelings towards her daughter.

She can't forgive her daughter for her wrongs.

So her daughter did something in the past which the Queen Maeve character, the main character, could not forgive her for, which made the scenes with her daughter super intense.

I think it's a perfect amount of intensity because if it's too intense, sometimes it's not enjoyable to watch, right?

But this one has probably the perfect balance of intensity and good laughs.

And I like it probably for that balance.

- Yeah, that balance is really important, I think.

And in helping achieve catharsis.

I think you can achieve it if actors are believable, right?

And it touches your soul.

When you watch them, they touch you.

You start having, I don't know, goosebumps or chills.

That's probably when it's going to happen.

So when you watch a play and they make you feel something, they make you cry, they make you laugh, you know that they are believable, you know that they are genuine, and you start feeling those emotions yourself.

I think that's when you say, yeah, we've reached that.

That's when catharsis is happening.

- Well, I can't wait to see the show.

I'm really looking forward to it.

When is the show running and where can people get tickets?

- It goes from, well, we preview on February 19th, which is a half-price performance, and it runs until March the 8th.

And we just, if you want tickets or make reservations, just go to our website, theatreinconnu.com.

Or theatreinconnu.com for all the Francophones out there.

And it will tell you how to either reserve without prepayment or how to reserve with prepayment.

- Diana, Clayton, thank you so much for joining us on the podcast.

We really appreciate having you on.

- Thanks for the time.

- Thank you.

- Theatre SKAM lives, works, and creates on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen people.

We acknowledge and respect the Songhees Nation and the Kosapsum Nation, whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

SKAMnanigans is hosted by me, Branden Sugden.

Our producer is Logan Swain.

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Thank you so much for listening.