

SKAMnanigans S2E19 Transcript

- 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.

Welcome back to SKAMnanigans, folks. I hope you enjoyed SKAMpede. I know we sure did! With our festival on the Goose wrapped for the year, it's time to turn our eyes to the other cornerstone arts festival of the summer, the Victoria Fringe Festival. As the saying goes, there is no rest for the wicked, and that is definitely true here at SKAM's office at Studio 846. We are always excited to have the SKAM Satellite Studio be a venue for the Fringe, and this year we're even more excited to be producing a show.

Earlier this week, I caught up with Logan and Sadie Fox to discuss the upcoming show at the Victoria Fringe, A Waste of Stage Time. Logan, Sadie, welcome to SKAMnanigans! Thank you for coming back on the show.

- It's my favorite podcast to be on.

- It's amazing when I get to sit on the other side of the microphone.

- For those of our audience members who may not know, I'm sitting down with Logan Swain, the artistic and managing director of Theatre SKAM, and Sadie Fox, the founder of The Sustainable Fox, who are working together on a show that's going to be at the Victoria Fringe Festival called A Waste of Stage Time. Can you guys tell us a little bit about what the show is all about?

- Imagine you were a piece of recycling, like a coffee cup or a yogurt container, and you get thrown away. What happens next?

- Well, that's what Trash and Treasure would like to help you better understand. When you show up for this show, it's like you're arriving at the transfer station, and Trash and Treasure are ready to be your guides to help you better understand the next step in your personal recycling process.

- And while doing so, you're going to learn exciting, fun things through games and Theatre about sustainability, recycling, materials, and a whole lot more.

- All while getting to hear a very lovely story, participate, rather, in a very lovely story between Trash and Treasure, where they come to better understand that value is

collaboratively bestowed on each other, and that looking out for each other can have a larger impact than we realize in any given moment.

- So I'm always so curious about shows that involve audience participation, and I'm curious how you guys are approaching preparing for the show with that element that you can't really rehearse necessarily. How are you approaching that?

- Can you say it's always challenging to plan for audience participation? I think one of the approaches that we're taking is unstructured structure and structured unstructure, and having a really strong sense of where those interactions begin and end, and leaving space for a lot of different versions of engagement. Knowing that not every audience member wants to be doing every version of engagement, I think that if you're the kind of audience member who is intrigued and curious about audience interaction, but not every version of it feels like it's for you, this actually might be a good show to show up to. There are going to be a lot of small moments where there are many different ways to participate, and it's all very fun and silly. Nobody's going to be put in a scenario where they're asked to do something outside of what they'd like to. It's all kind of a jump-up opportunity to be a participant.

- That's great! Yeah, giving the audience agency to determine their level of participation in the show. You guys have been working sort of with the community in town to develop this show, and I'm also curious about that approach. How do you approach collaborating with maybe a group of people that you don't necessarily know who's going to be coming to every session? How do you go about integrating ideas from the community with what you're wanting to say with the show? Is that like a symbiotic relationship that they feed off of each other?

- The way you try to solicit that engagement and feedback is really important. On our side, I think something that has been really beneficial is when we do show up to those community collaborative sessions, we understand what we're asking for. It's often like an identifiable chunk where we're going, "We want to outsource some community thinking and thought power to help us answer this question and better understand this idea." The holistic version of engagement and discussion or feedback that comes from that really helps us to just better understand the material that we're working with.

- There are some versions of soliciting feedback that can feel almost like a tidal wave, and it's like, "How do we intake this? How does this authentically become part of the show?" So far, it has felt very much like community ideas are being integrated without it feeling confusing, at least to myself.

- Yeah, I think we've been trying to keep it pretty laid-back. We have one very specific thing that we're trying to answer or reason or figure out, but then we're kind of encapsulating it in a broader discussion or fun activity to make it a bigger thing,

encompassing the little small thing that is actually what we're trying to get at. Then it's not too specific, so we can worry about the specifics later. The "Paradoke" songwriting is one example. We did a "Paradoke" writing session after "Eco Hour," and then at SKAMPede, we had a worksheet with different songs we were considering and some instructions, where people could try writing a "Paradoke" song we might use in the show.

- Coming up this week, which will be in the past when the episode airs (because podcast magic!), we're having a karaoke mix and mingle for artists in Victoria, where we're going to have karaoke. We are also going to be singing some of our "Paradoke" songs that we're working on for the first time ever live for people, really bringing in that fun of artistic trust with other artists. Come have fun and get a sneak peek of the show and give us feedback too!

- 'Cause we obviously think everything is hilarious and really funny and has so many layers of meaning. We're having so much fun, but we're also so close to it. We have very specific experiences and worldviews and all of that stuff. It might be horrible.

- Like it won't, but like it might not be as funny to other people, and sometimes that's okay. But the key to finding things is to have other artists that we trust and give them a stake in it too. When we're saying, "Hey, come see the show. Here's some tickets. I'll comp you in. Come see it," they have more connection to it. I think is always valuable when you're creating something new.

- I actually have one quite tangible example of non-specific feedback resulting in a really tangible creative choice. At one of our first engagement sessions, we had some really cool open-ended discussions about what is waste? What does it sound like? What does it look like? How do we feel about it? Through that, we ended up really naturally landing on two dichotomies of how we understand waste, and that being kind of the treasure filter and the trash filter.

- That session ended, and everybody went away. Logan and I looked at each other and we were like, "Okay, well, our characters are Trash and Treasure, right?" And it just fell into place, made perfect sense, and became these really beautiful foils for considering this idea. These characters now allow us these avenues to consider something very mundane in a fully personified and quickly understandable way.

- I love that, that clicking into the grid kind of moment into the creative power of the universe, almost where you instantly know, "Okay, this is what we need to do." That's how you know you're onto an idea that's got legs.

- On a slight deviation, what's your favorite "Paradoke" song you've written so far?

- I was just working on an adaptation of "If I Had a Million Dollars," which ends up being, "If I Am a Mixed Container." Maybe it's just because I've been really working on it in the last couple of days, but I'm enjoying that. I do really like the first one I wrote—a version of "Watermelon Sugar" by Harry Styles, called "Categorized Refuse." I think it's really good in my totally unbiased opinion, but I don't know, Spotify might censor us if I say what that song is about.

- For those who know what that song is about, the idea of making it about sorting waste in that context artistically really tickles my fancy. (laughing) It is absolutely a well-written "Paradoke."

- Something else that I think is really interesting about this project, in particular, is Theatre SKAM and The Sustainable Fox. For anyone who's listening to this podcast, almost certainly knows that you two have been collaborating a lot for quite some time, but it's almost always on the operational side or community engagement in a less specifically arts or show-oriented way. I'm curious about what it has been like transitioning into an artistic collaboration with all of that history.

- We were talking about this the other day. It's actually been really smooth for the most part, but let me answer with a story. When we got the Fringe spot a few years ago, we decided we were going to start putting in for the Fringe lottery, and if we got a spot, we'd do a show. Then we got one this year, and I was like, "Oh no, I have to do a Fringe show!" It was not a burden, but it was like, "Oh, well, gosh darn, we have to make a Fringe show."

- Branden, you were here still at this time, but it was like, "Oh, what do we do? Do we program something? Do we put out a call?" Then I just landed on the idea: "What if Sadie and I make a show?" Sadie is the one person who I'm like, "We can make a show and have so much fun. It could be meaningful in the work that we do. All theatre is meaningful, but layers of meaningfulness."

- So that's kind of how we got to it. We've had this slow build over six years now. We've done seven SKAMpedes of kind of incremental, increased layers of working together and building collaboration styles and familiarity with each other. It's been really fun to step into that kind of creative side of like, "It's what we do. It's sustainability! It's events! It's all that, but it's art." How can we use Theatre to make it more accessible or a different style of educating?

- I think you put it in a way yesterday that really struck me too. Theatre SKAM, what you do is art. That's the main medium that you work in, and Theatre SKAM has really invested in the services that The Sustainable Fox offers over the last seven years. As Logan put it yesterday, the next step is to put it in the art.

- That really resonates with me, especially as someone who was working in a Theatre career prior to stepping back to start an environmentally based business because I feel called to that and have a responsibility to that. I can't even say how gratifying it is to get the opportunity to indulge in creative, different, interesting, philosophical conversations that mix one of my original passions for Theatre and performance.

- I'm questioning how we put things on stage and taking this current passion of helping people to better understand their waste, their own impact, and opportunities for engagement. Providing education is so, so gratifying. I couldn't ask for better collaborators than Theatre SKAM.

- The fact that we've been doing this work together for seven years allows us to have the conversation about waste and these systems and infrastructures we want to inform other people about in a fun way. We can start this conversation from a different place because we have so much shared language, ethos, and understanding. We can jump into creative metaphor without needing to say, "Okay, wait, what are we actually talking about?"

- That's been really gratifying also as creative partners.

- The thought of doing it in the form of a show that's like 30 to 45 minutes is really interesting too because it allows you to get so much more in-depth when it comes to educating people about the Capital Region's recycling infrastructure and what it can and cannot do. This is much more effective than when you're stopping someone on the bike trail at SKAMpede for a quick couple of minute chat about it or whatever.

- I'm kind of curious, what is something about the educational portion of the show that is really exciting to you, or that you maybe don't ordinarily get to share with such a wide audience?

- Okay, I love this question! One of the things that I find people often want to know about, but we almost never get to conversationally at events, is actually how waste gets sorted. They might not even know that's the question they want to ask, but it's actually like, "Okay, what are the machines doing? Why can I put plastic, tin, and carton board in the same bin, but I can't put other stuff in the same bin?" The answer is the machines on the other side! I think that's something we're going to kind of expose for people in a very fun and silly way.

- I'm very excited to share some of that education along with other basics about specifically the mixed container category of recycling, which I think is the most confusing for many folks. We're going to get very specific in a fun and silly way about understanding that recycling.

- That's actually great because I've always wanted to know how the machines work. I thought, "It can't just be people going, 'Okay, that's cardboard, that's plastic.'" That's so awesome! I love hearing that.

- This wraps up the end of my pre-written questions, but I'm sort of just curious, similar to the last question, what is one thing artistically about the show that you're really excited to be able to share with the people in Victoria?

- I mostly do tech and design! One of the things I'm artistically excited about is that from very early on, the idea was to put the tech on stage. We're putting that behind-the-scenes artistic and operational labor as part of the show.

- It's kind of growing from that now. It's a bit of the shtick that "the tech runs on the stage," because that is interesting to me in flipping those expectations. It's actually taken on the whole through line in the show now of the value that that brings to performance and the integral role that it plays.

- I'm also excited because I love tech! I love tinkering, I love nerding out on that stuff, and there are a couple of things that we're playing with that I won't disclose just because I don't even know if they're going to work.

- If they do, we want them to be a surprise!

- Yeah! It's going to be one of those like, "What the heck? How did you even think of that?" One of the things I will say is that obviously we're performing, but Sadie's a stage manager and I do tech and all that. We don't have a stage manager and we're the actors. At one point earlier on, we were like, "Who's performing the show? Is it us?" I guess it's us. And now it's like, "It has to be us!"

- The whole show is a 45-minute Fringe show, which is super short, which I love! Any show I can sit through for 45 minutes before I get antsy and need to stand is great. The whole show is timed because in the lore of A Waste of Stage Time, there's only 45 minutes between the truck—the metaphorical truck that drops off the audience—that arrives and when the next load of recycling shows up.

- It's very much like Night at the Museum or Toy Story! We have 45 minutes until the humans, who are affectionately referred to as the "meatbags," arrive. We have to "unanimate" our stuff and just be like plastic cups.

- The whole show has a timer running, counting down from 45. That really excites me because as we're actively wasting people's time for artistic self-indulgence, they can literally watch the clock ticking down.

- At the start, you said 45 minutes is just enough time to do all this stuff, and now you're wasting time! What are you doing? So, I am jazzed about that stuff!

- I 100% agree. I think we've found a few really fun conventions to play in. Pretty much all of them have either developed from our own artistic drive to experiment with something in particular or from our interrogation of what is waste? What does it mean to put that on stage?

- The title of the show, A Waste of Stage Time, appeared very naturally and has just fit so well since. It's been a fun convention to play with, especially as people who come from a tech-minded side of Theatre. How do we do that in a way that is actually fun to be around?

- We like to experiment with ways of wasting time on stage, but we would never want you to feel like your time is actually wasted by being there. That's been very fun to play with!

- Well, I can't wait to see the show at the Victoria Fringe! Sadie, Logan, thank you so much for coming on SKAMnigans.

- Thank you so much, as ever!

- Thanks for having us!

A Waste of Stage Time is at the SKAM Satellite Studio, which is venue four of the Victoria Fringe. The festival is from August 20th to 31st, and A Waste of Stage Time plays throughout that run. You can get the dates for performances on our website, SKAM.ca, or you can get information about all the shows at the festival by visiting victoriafringe.com.

Keep an eye out for a sneak peek of A Waste of Stage Time at Fringe Eve Preview on August 20th at Market Square. Also, listeners of SKAMnigans are in for a special treat! If you email the word "rethink" to logan@SKAM.ca, you will be entered into a draw for two free tickets to A Waste of Stage Time. You aren't going to want to miss this show. It's going to be a wonderful time for you and a friend. So make sure to email the word "rethink" to logan@SKAM.ca for your chance to win!

Make sure to check out some of the other excellent talent at the Fringe, both local and from afar. My tip to any of you Fringers out there is to see at least one show that you wouldn't ordinarily check out. It's a surefire way to be surprised and have your socks knocked off.

Thanks for listening to this episode of SKAMnigans, and happy fringing, Victoria!

- Theatre SKAM lives, works, and creates on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen people. We acknowledge and respect the Songhees Nation and Kosapsum Nation, whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

SKAMnanigans is hosted by me, Branden Sugden. Our producer is Logan Swain. Marketing materials and graphics are by Janine Rzeplinski. We would like to acknowledge the support of our operational funders, the BC Arts Council and the Capital Regional District for their support of Theatre SKAM. Transcripts for our episodes can be found at [SKAM.ca/podcast](https://skam.ca/podcast). SKAMnanigans can be found wherever you get your podcasts. Subscribe to get notified when new episodes drop. Thank you so much for listening.