

# SKAMnanigans S2E20 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!

The Fringe Festival may be in the rearview mirror, but there's still plenty of exciting independent Theatre happening here in Victoria. In this episode of SKAMnanigans, I sit down with Matthew (Mia) Gordon of Pithy Productions and Link Bechtold of Anywhere Nowhere Creations, who together are bringing a new original play called Tiresias to the stage later this month.

Tiresias is a play that is based on ancient Greek myth, so just a warning for those of you who don't want to be hearing discussions that include a couple of brief mentions of sexual assault, as well as a larger discussion around gender dysphoria. These are topics that will come up in the following conversation. If that is something that is not good for you today, I encourage you to skip this episode. Make sure to take care of yourself.

We do have an announcement about SKAMnanigans at the end of the episode. The timecode to jump to that announcement will be in the description. Without further delay, here's my discussion with the creators of Tiresias.

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Hello, welcome to SKAMnanigans. We're so glad to have you back on. I'm sitting down right now with Matthew Gordon.

Hello.

And Link Bechtold.

Hi.

So the both of you are working on a new production of Tiresias, which is a collaboration between Pithy Productions and Anywhere Nowhere Creations. For those of our audience who aren't familiar with those companies, could you both just speak a little bit about what the companies have been doing in the community and how this collaboration came together?

So Pithy Productions is a company focused on developing new works, especially by queer artists and for queer artists, especially trans folk. We started about a year and

a half ago and have already done a summer of festivals and an independent production. I'm personally friends with Link and the other folks at Anywhere Nowhere Creations, and I was very familiar with Tiresias in its early creation. So I sort of approached Link about staging that, maybe doing it with Pithy, and Link kind of countered back with, "Hey, we're trying to start this thing. We're trying to do our own work with Anywhere Nowhere Creations. Would Pithy be interested in collaborating, maybe providing some guidance since we'd done some of this work before?"

Anywhere Nowhere Creations, we're an upcoming creation company, which we've chosen to label ourselves as rather than a Theatre company specifically, because talking with our group, we really want to focus on creating work throughout any genre and medium. Right now, it's been pretty centrally Theatre. Tiresias is our second show. The first was Peregrine and Death, which August wrote and was produced at the Between Words Theatre Festival this year. We're hoping to get some more going throughout the year, but it might be less of a seasonal thing and more just when we come together. We started as primarily a writing group, and so that's probably going to be where a lot of our focus lies is in the creation and then sometimes distribution as well.

So Tiresias is described as a modern trans telling of several Greek myths featuring characters who go through gender and sex changes. It primarily follows Tiresias, who in myth, before becoming the blind prophet of Thebes, was turned into a woman after killing two mating snakes on a mountain and lived as a woman for many years. That's just a little bit of background information for those who maybe aren't familiar with the myth of Tiresias.

I'm curious, Link, as the writer of the show, could you speak a little bit to where the inspiration for this production came from and sort of where you looked for inspiration as you developed it into a full script?

It started in response to another show, also called Tiresias, that was going to be part of the Phoenix Theatre's 2022-2023 season. That had been created by a past professor and commissioned by the Theatre department. When the student body read it, they decided upon reading it that it was not a show that they felt really gave what we wanted to the community and showcased transness in its best light. For a show that claimed to celebrate transness, it was actually kind of transphobic, a little bit racist, and a little bit misogynistic. The student body just outright said, "We're not going to do this." We collectively agreed that everyone was going to turn down every role they were offered.

There was a meeting, and we eventually got it removed from the season, and in its place was Spring Awakening. That is kind of where the idea started for me; that play I felt didn't quite give the character of Tiresias herself justice. She was kind of a little bit of a side character. Even though she had the name of the play, like she was the

title character, she was very wishy-washy about her gender. I was like, I wonder how we can actually tell this story that has two sex changes, which are often correlated to two gender changes, and still keep it quintessentially transgender. I percolated on that for a while. My first thoughts were to have her figure out through her seven years as a woman that she was non-binary and through that, wanting to get like a reversal sex change. Another option I speculated on was going a full detransition story, which I do think is very important to share. We don't have, I feel like, almost any detransitioning stories on stage or in media at all, at least none that I've seen. But it wasn't still quite the story I wanted to tell.

What I ended up settling on is Tiresias in this play is a trans woman who goes through a lot of what people typically see as like your normal transition and then figures out bomb surgery wasn't the right choice for her without that negating her identity as a woman. I think it's really inspiring to see you taking on kind of... it's not like—what I'm trying to say is that it's not academic, but it's very intellectual work. I feel like by saying intellectual, that makes it sound overly serious. I've done a lot of thinking about gender and a lot of reading about gender—not necessarily academic papers per se, but just a lot of comics, a lot of short stories. I think that another bit of inspiration was Maya Kobabi's comic Gender Queer, Nate Stevenson, who is the author of Nimona, is one of my inspirations, as well as for Tiresias herself, Laura Jane Grace of the band Against Me was one of my central figures.

And you also spent quite a lot of time in the trans archives.

I did. Yeah, that was part of writing, finishing up the first draft as a directed study in my last year of school. I think that's always such a good sign for the writer of a show to have pondered this thing and to have gone on a journey of exploration in the process of writing the show, rather than coming in from the standpoint right from day one of like, "This is exactly what I want to say. This is how I'm going to say it." I think going on that journey helps you avoid that feeling that I think a lot of people experience sometimes in the Theatre where they're like, "Wow, I just feel like I'm sitting at a lecture that's being brought to life with actors instead of professors and a PowerPoint."

Can you speak a little bit more about what that journey was like or what's something you maybe learned about yourself or just about gender in general through that journey?

It was quite interesting. I'm not sure if I— I did actually, I guess, learn some things about myself, not really on purpose. But I feel like through this time of writing it, a lot of the characters in Tiresias, including Tiresias herself, even though I'm a trans man rather than a trans woman, all of them have some part of kind of my experience or who I am in them. Tiresias gets my anxiety. Sorry. But through that, I infused it with a lot of my own experiences of wanting a label really hard. When I was first coming

out, I was like, "I need to find the really specific micro label that fits who I am." My mom was constantly trying to get me to just take a step back: "You don't have to do that." To me, that sounded like, "You're wrong; you're not trans," which is not what she was saying at all. But it's interesting; through this process, I think I've actually found that I have settled into that point where I'm like, "I don't know what my gender is. I know that I'm more comfortable in my body through transitioning." And that's all I really care about.

At this point, there are fluctuations sometimes. Honestly, I feel like I sit at kind of a net zero agender space a lot of the time, which is not where I thought I would end up. But I feel like you don't really plan necessarily where your gender is going to go.

So what you're talking about with this journey that you went on, kind of deconstructing gender and exploring that—what it means for yourself and also for the character of Tiresias—is really interesting because it comes to another question I wanted to ask you. Some of our listeners who are familiar with Greek mythology may know Tiresias, in myth, is often turned into a woman by Hera, and this is sort of framed as a punishment or a reward. I'm curious about how you approached that particular component of the myth in a way that's not taking away agency from Tiresias or that is presenting that sort of sex change element in a more 21st-century lens.

Yeah, for sure. That was something that was really high on my list going into this from the get-go. I didn't want Hera to be a bad person. I feel like there's a lot of portrayals of Hera where she is kind of like just the catty, bratty wife of Zeus, and I didn't want any of the sex changes in this show to be a punishment for any of the characters. That is something I think, Mia, you found also probably—and Mia did a lot of the research as the dramaturg on this—into Tiresias and then the other five characters I have as the chorus: Zucanius, Soproides, Leucius, Iphus, and Maestra. Apologies to the Greek majors out there who may catch me mispronouncing names—I'm not sure if I am. But for all of them, I didn't want any of them to be a punishment. In the myths, I feel like probably about half were kind of at least punishment adjacent. Some of them were raised as the opposite gender and then later on in life were like, "Please make me this gender for real."

Or their parents did that. Two of them, I think Maestra and Canius, both get sex changes after being raped or sexually assaulted. Actually, that's not quite true.

Oh, not true? Sorry.

Thank you. Please jump in.

Yeah. So Maestra just is a shapeshifter in myth and can just kind of do that without any god's will and has her own myth with Poseidon. Canius, also with Poseidon, is,

in some tellings, assaulted; in other tellings, a willing partner who, in either case, as a reward afterwards by Poseidon, is gifted this sex change.

Yeah, I wanted to make sure that all the characters had agency in their sex changes because that was another thing I was really cautious of in writing this play. It's not intended to come across as agreement with all the people who say, "Oh, you might regret your surgery. Therefore, trans people shouldn't be allowed access to gender-affirming care." It was really important to me that especially with Tiresias' myth, even though she has made a mistake, it wasn't framed necessarily as everyone does this and that all the characters wanted this going in. And Tiresias herself wants other aspects of her transition. It's just this one point where transmedicalism is taken too far and infests her brain. That sort of societal pressure to transition and to pass—that is what makes her do this rather than it being like, "Oopsie! You didn't think long enough about this!" Because I don't think it usually is.

So great to hear how much thought you've obviously put into this, because it is sort of difficult territory, I think, to navigate that—particularly when you're working with material that's 2,000-ish years old.

Obviously, there's going to be some changes that need to be made in order to also just get the story through to a modern audience. Mia, I'm wondering if you can speak a little bit to that as the dramaturg. How did you approach supporting the writing of this piece when it's adapting Greek myth into a play for a 21st-century audience?

Definitely where I started—and love to start—is just with research of the source material. I read through a few collections of myths. I read through Ovid, who's a Roman storyteller retelling a lot of Greek myths. I read through Hesiod's Catalog of Women, which is one of the only primary sources I could find on Maestra in particular. I read through Toninus Liberalis; he was a Greek poet who told some of the earliest tellings of these stories that I could find. That's where we get the story of Lucipus. Lucipus is a really important character for this play because it's in their story that we actually get a mention of every single other character in this play, which, funnily coincidentally enough, Link did not know.

I did not know at all.

This is—Mother begs the goddess Leto to turn her daughter into a son because she had been hiding the fact that he was born a girl for many, many years and now that puberty was happening, felt that they could not keep that up. So she goes and begs the goddess Leto, "Please, please, please change his sex," and lists off all these other Greek mythical characters who, through the will of the gods, have done so. It lists off Ifis, who pretty much has a very similar story to Lucipus in like, was born a girl—that's bad—raised as a boy, "Oh please, please make this real." Canius, who was turned into a mammoth by Poseidon, Maestra, who just shapeshifts, Tiresias,

turned into a woman, turned back into a man, and Seprotes, who was a hunter turned into a woman by Artemis after she saw her bathing. That one line is the only instance of Suproites that isn't lost to time; just that one mention. There's no story to find there.

So I started with those stories and I brought them to Link. My intent there was to strengthen what was written by connecting it with these myths, strengthening those ties between them. I think what's really beautiful about this play is that where there are departures—because of course there are departures—they mirror and shape themselves around these original myths.

I find Canius in particular is a really great example of this in the script, where in the original myth, after sleeping with Poseidon, he asks to be turned into a man by him, whereas now Canius is trying to prove to himself that he is a woman by seeking out penetrative sex. And when that doesn't work for him, it really proves the opposite. And he transitions very soon after that.

Obviously, adapting Greek myth into a 21st-century play has a lot of moving parts going through it. The number of approaches you could take are presumably endless. I think it's really cool that you sort of mentioned, like, departing from myth and not letting the myth bog down the play. Let the play be itself and not feel like it has to be like an ancient Greek literature class at the same time.

I'd love to touch on that too if I can, Branden, because I find it really interesting with all the departures. It took me figuring out that I could write the play in the structure of a Greek tragedy for it to actually click in my mind as like, "That's how I'm going to do it," and that's how I'm going to approach it. The more I've leaned into the use of the chorus and working with that structure of audience direct address and scenes between the chorus and Tiresias and scenes with Tiresias by herself—it's made it a lot easier, relying on the myth to then break away from it and using that ancient Greek structure to do a modern play.

I'm so glad you touched on that because that was kind of where my next question was going—about the formatting of an ancient Greek tragedy play and the incorporation of chorus into the show. I'm curious, could you just, for our audience members who haven't taken a Theatre history class, speak about what role the chorus played in ancient Greek tragedies? And also, are there any modern examples that you perhaps pulled from when figuring out how to incorporate that chorus today, or did you really stick to sort of the way it was done by Aristophanes, etc.?

The ancient Greek chorus kind of served a role to act usually as the citizenry of wherever the ancient Greek place was set. I can't remember how much their role is in comedies, I know they're definitely in tragedies, and they were usually meant to represent the citizens—usually probably the higher class—and also the audience in

that way, so the audience has someone they can directly relate to that brings them through this story.

Modern examples? I feel like there definitely are some. I don't know if I drew from modern ones so much, I'll be so honest, because I can't think of any right now. The closest I can get is while we started our first month of rehearsals and were doing a lot of work on the script and building a foundation of movement and script work. I was watching some of the cast members in the recent production of *Romeo and Juliet* by the Greater Victoria Shakespeare Festival. They start and end that play with choral speaking to do the prologue and the final little end bit. I was like, "Aha! So speaking in groups does work, and I can do it." So that was really nice.

And on a similar note, I believe the show also incorporates some masks. Could you both speak to how that incorporation was brought into the project? Is that something that you pulled from the ancient Greek tragedy stuff, or is that something that's been pulled from somewhere else?

Yeah, it's definitely largely from ancient Greek tragedy. The actors would all be masked, I believe. I'm pretty sure that most of the actors wore masks, like the entire time, especially the chorus. So it was mostly just as a callback to that because I really wanted the chorus to exist a little bit out of time—as a tie back to ancient Greece and to the modern day—and just exist beyond our comprehension in a way.

The masks have definitely done that. What's it like working with masks and how have you been approaching that in the rehearsal room?

To start, I did some little workshops with the cast to teach them some like mask foundations. So just getting—finding a mask body, interacting with other people in mask. Using the masks as the chorus, I feel like is actually pretty kind of different than that. We're not doing a lot of like, "And now you're a little guy in a mask." They do a lot of movement, and using the masks in rehearsals is weird, largely because we're working with not super nice masks—like the type you'd find at a dollar store. When I first introduced masks, all I could find were these fox masks, which was funny. Now they're just really creepy; they put them on and stare at me, and they all just have big white foreheads. I'm like, "Okay!" But I think it'll be very cool. Our costume designer, Lillian, is going to decorate them and stuff.

Mia, Link, I know you both need to be going in order to get to rehearsal for the show, but I'm just wondering, is there anything else that you want our audience to know about the show or that you want to talk about in relationship to *Tiresias*?

Yeah, I'd love to speak on briefly about the ways we're subverting these gender essentialist and transmedical narratives that I feel are very common in popular media and in the community in general.

Can you just define those terms for us as well? Gender essentialism and transmedical narratives?

Absolutely. Transmedicalism is the train of thought where transness is defined by a medical transition and that that is the ultimate goal of being trans: to transition that way. Gender essentialism is something I have less of a grasp on, but it's very much to do with binary male and female and often is in relation to pairing male and female and reproducing.

Yeah, I feel like there's also like an element to it of your sex is your gender. I feel like in gender essentialism, maybe, but it definitely relates to the ability to have sexual intercourse and make babies.

Yeah, and so in this play, we really hope to subvert those trains of thought. First, by staging a large variety of trans bodies and experiences that don't necessarily align with a binary. Tiresias is a great example herself, where she transitions, assumes that a medical transition is the right choice for her, and then in the course of the play finds out, "No, I am a woman with a dick, and that's what's best for me."

We also want to stage characters who know that they want very different things from how they present. Lucipus, for example, in myth, turned into a man. In the script, Tiresias is a trans man—yeah, trans man, transmasculine—who really just loves their boobs and does not want to get top surgery. Ifis is a transmasculine lesbian, which we've seen a lot of online discourse about people trying to police that label specifically and try to exclude people with transmasculinity from lesbian communities, which does not jive with us. We have Maestra, who is, in the script, gender fluid and kind of shifts through genders very fluidly within a day or between days, with gender identities that aren't necessarily, "Oh, I feel like a man today. I feel like a woman today."

I feel like I'm ready to like freaking rant, and I need to not because I have so many thoughts about this. But yeah, I think it's a really central part of this play—is undermining those ideas. I was coming to terms with my gender identity in the age of online transmedicalism, where part of that is this idea that you need dysphoria to be trans. Dysphoria being like the pain of not feeling comfortable in your gender identity. At the time, I wasn't aware that I experienced any dysphoria, and I felt incredibly invalidated.

So when I first read a book that focused on the idea of gender euphoria and following that joy, and also had a lot of references to different trans people who had many different transitions—some of them were, yeah, transmasculine who didn't want to go on hormones or have any surgeries, transmasculine who only had surgeries, that sort of thing—it really opened up a lot for me. I remember almost



crying essentially. I think that's really important for trans people so that we can find space for all of us within this community and don't keep knocking each other down, as well as for the audience members who aren't transgender but are open to understanding that.

I really want to undermine that idea of gender essentialism, partly because I think it's really boring and limiting, especially because I think it tends to come down on cis women where they're like, "Feminism—being a woman is about making babies." I'm like, "Do you really, like in your heart of hearts, want that to be all womanhood is about? Really?" There are so many things you could pick! And I think also part of that is like—it's always this dichotomy defining what's a man versus defining what's a woman. So if we can just take both those concepts and go, "You can actually do whatever you want."

I hope people will leave this having had their minds opened to the idea that, I guess on one hand, having dysphoria doesn't necessarily make you trans. And on the other hand, there's no right way to be any specific gender and that gender-affirming care is for literally everyone. Also, it's way more expansive than we typically think of it as—basically anything you do to express yourself is kind of a form of gender-affirming care if you feel good about it.

And so that's, yeah, there's just a lot—there's a lot of thoughts.

Yeah, we see this like biting back against the idea that gender is dysphoria-defined a lot in the scripts. These characters in-universe constantly are joy-driven. Everything they do in pursuit of their gender is driven by what feels good, what makes me happy, what is joyful. Even if things go wrong and there's sadness there—because there is—it's less of, "I made a mistake," or some of that—it is, and it's less coming from the inside for them and more about how society doesn't shape to them, if that makes sense.

Yeah, no, 100%. I totally see what you're talking about, and I think that's something, you know, that I've never seen explored in any way, shape, or form in any media that I've been exposed to. I think that this show is really part of an important conversation that needs to be had today. It will open up a lot of minds of people who are not in the trans community and therefore aren't necessarily involved in these conversations in the way that people who are in the trans community and who have spent lots of time pondering this stuff have been exposed to those ideas.

So I think it sounds like this play is really important, and I'm really glad to hear that it's going to be on the stage in Victoria soon.

Link, Matthew, thank you so much for joining us on SKAMnanigans. We're so glad to have had you.

Yeah, thank you.

Thank you for having us.

Thank you so much.

Tiresias runs September 26th to 28th at the Intrepid Theatre Studio. The link for tickets is available now. You can find information about the show on Instagram at [pithy\\_productions](#) or at [anywhere.nowhere.creations](#).

Thank you for listening to the latest episode of SKAMnanigans. We are so glad to have had you along with us for the ride in the 2025 season of the show. We are going to be going on hiatus until 2026. We're working on some very exciting ideas for the future of the podcast, and we can't wait to share more of that with you when we're able to.

If you have ideas for what you would like to hear out of SKAMnanigans going forward, let us know. You can contact us via email using [podcast@skam.ca](mailto:podcast@skam.ca). Make sure to follow Theatre SKAM on Instagram if you haven't already to keep up to date with the company and to hear more about when we're getting ready to be back in your ears.

Thank you for joining us for the 2025 season of SKAMnanigans. I've been your host, Branden Sugden. I look forward to talking to you again soon.

Theatre SKAM lives, works, and creates on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen people. We acknowledge and respect the Songhees Nation and the Esquimalt 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](http://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.