



Translating Experiences

A Little Commitment – Kiruna Stamel and Gareth Beliner

A Commission for DaDaFest International 2020 – Translations!

Podcast 3

Interview with Amanda Wild and Wendy Rouse from Red Earth Theatre:

KIRUNA: Hello and welcome to DaDaFest International 2020, Translating Experiences

GARETH: We're your hosts Gareth Berliner and Kiruna Stamel

KIRUNA: Today we're speaking to Amanda Wild and Wendy Rouse from Red Earth Theatre.

GARETH: This interview was also recorded on Skype due to COVID restriction so we apologise for any effect this may have had on the sound quality of the recording.

KIRUNA: Wendy and Amanda from Red Earth Theatre Company. Welcome and thank you so much for joining us.

WENDY: Hi

AMANDA: hello, hello

WENDY: hello

GARETH: hello

KIRUNA: hello

WENDY: hello!

KIRUNA: So we decided to invite you onto the podcast and chat because one of the things we love about your work is how you were able to translate concepts and make them more accessible for your audience, but before we jump into all of that, why don't you tell us a little bit about Red Earth Theatre Company and how you came to form the company?

AMANDA: So, Red Earth Theatre, we've been going for 21 years. We're actually of age.

KIRUNA: Ooh!

AMANDA: Which is brilliant, this year

KIRUNA: We should have bought you a key.

GARETH: Yeah, congratulations

AMANDA: I know, but because of COVID we haven't really, kind of, broadcast that much, have we? So we make and tour theatre that is in two languages, it's in sign language and in English, and we make theatre that's for family audiences, and our primary audience are children, young people and then the adults sort of come with them to see theatre. We are essentially a devising company, but we kind of found this amazing thing that happened to us when we started working with the d/Deaf community in Derby. We found that working in sign language even though we had no idea what it was and, if we're talking about translation, we actually went in with two feet with no idea and sometimes we would go into rehearsal sessions with this Community group called Derby Deaf Drama and they would be chatting away to each other in sign language and we would have no idea what they were talking about, would we? But we've learned a lot from them as a community group.

KIRUNA: And do you think that takes a lot of trust? Because I've been in a rehearsal room with the odd director who is not at all fluent in BSL who has been highly suspect of the deaf actors and what the deaf actors are saying to one another. So how did you feel, not knowing the language that was being used around?

WENDY: You know what that... that trust, I would say, the boots on the other foot. It was the trust of the d/Deaf community in us. If we do have that trust and some d/Deaf people will tell you that they do trust us, then that's one of the biggest sources of, kind of, achievement for us, I think, because yeah, because Amanda said we still started out with all of those kinds of assumptions and biases and prejudices and absolute ignorance about the d/Deaf world, and about d/Deaf culture and about the d/Deaf language, and so actually what we found locally, particularly right across the Midlands, enormous generosity of the d/Deaf community saying "Actually fair play to you, reaching out to us" We're not a d/Deaf

led company, that was never the intention. The intention was always to be inclusive, and we continue to learn and benefit from the d/Deaf community. So it's very much a two-way relationship.

KIRUNA: The experience of working bilingually, so trusting your BSL performers and interpreters to be doing their job and for you both to be working in English in parallel. There must be skills that you've developed that have allowed you to make your work more accessible to broader disabled groups going beyond the d/Deaf audience and reaching other groups that might need visual cues or other ways of accessing language. Has that been the case?

AMANDA: Parents and teachers really, really love the fact that the shows are visual and I think what's really interesting is that because we're making theatre primarily for children, we have found that British Sign Language & sign language not necessarily BSL pure but Sign Supported English, which is, kind of, more in English grammar than British Sign Language and Gestural Theatre are really important, and that's what engages children who have other disabilities, because it's the highly visual nature of the work that we do that means that they can access it on different levels and even children whose first language isn't English, they find it really, really easy well much easier to access our theatre because of that. So I think we have over the years with the Deaf artists that we work with the Deaf directors and the British Sign Language interpreters, we have developed a kind of style of performance that I don't think many other companies have, and I think, you know, in the last few shows that we've done, there have been some moments of incredible communication where you know we're talking about translation, where communication is going on on so many different levels with sign language integration, with the sign song with gestural Theatre that I just think it's a really rich mix.

GARETH: Out of interest Wendy, as perhaps the main writer initially, can I ask when you write to you write already, as you're writing, thinking about the interpretations of the elements that you want to add for the d/Deaf disabled neuro diverse audience, or do you write the story and then go back and see "Right, how can I change that?", You know, is it coming naturally now like a second language, or do you have to go back and then paint the picture?

WENDY: There is a story idea to begin with and part of that Gareth is that we have to sell show titles to venues who are very suspicious of new titles or titles they don't recognise so new work is notoriously difficult to sell so we do tend to come up with a story idea initially, but then you know because we are a devising company so we have a kind of scenario really and we take it into a rehearsal room and I think our job is to translate the story as it develops with actors and technicians, more and more we've involved technicians with lighting, our designer, so working with you two guys all those years ago when we first did that, if you remember, that

relationship was around translating your vision for these two characters and how did we do it? And the four of us actually were in a room together, weren't we?

GARETH: Yes.

KIRUNA: Mhmm

WENDY: Fleshing that out, so in terms of the access of it, it was accessible as we could possibly make it with our meagre budgets

GARETH: I should explain to the audience listening that we actually did a show called Pirate and Parrot, which was devised by Red Earth Theatre

KIRUNA: And we still are, we're actually taking it from theatre and putting it onto the screen,

GARETH: ...and still working with Wendy and Amanda

KIRUNA: so Wendy, Amanda, Gareth, and myself have actually got our own project together, and what's interesting is what we're wanting to do on screen for children's Television is to take some of these ideas that Wendy and Amanda have been practising in theatre and make them work for the screen, so it's going to be an interesting process for us and we're in the middle of actually exploring that that's outside of the podcasts. But I always feel quite inspired when I see your work, and it's interesting that the images that your Theatre often evokes for me is like a pop-up book that's come to life, like there's that idea of the layering, and now that you know I've been married to Gareth for eight years, so I'm much more familiar with comics, comic strips, and sort of your DC and your Marvel films, the idea of multiverses, so the idea that you've got worlds within worlds within worlds

GARETH: layered, multi layered.

KIRUNA: and it's the layering of your work that I find really very enriching.

GARETH: Well what I would say is your work, from having seen it right from the early days, when I first saw it when Kiruna was involved in a play with you,

KIRUNA: 'The Lost Happy Ending' would have been what you saw, yeah

GARETH: The lost happy ending, yeah, to see that multilayering it's, it's very because I also studied film and it's very similar to how a good film should work and a good film I should be able to go back and watch and, within a scene I've already seen, I should suddenly notice extra things details in the background and that's one thing with Red Earth Theatre that's always stuck out that you could see a piece by Red Earth more than once and suddenly notice a word that had been

tucked into the background of the set or the use of language and the sign that was being made that went with it, often because there's creatively so much great stuff going on right in front of you on stage you can miss it and to find any work that you can see again, particularly in theatre, is quite amazing.

AMANDA: I suppose the ideal way of working is that everybody that we work with is a writer and we realised, early on, when we started working with the Deaf Community group was they have to be writers as much as we do because, we can suggest an English text, but, as you were saying Kiruna, often in our plays an English sentence might be quite long, but in BSL translation is finished in a couple of signs, and then it might be the opposite, because in the BSL they've got to put placement in, they've got to explain something about what's happening that it might take a lot longer than the English sentence, so there's a kind of, in the translation process, there's a kind of rhythm that happens that sometimes the BSL has a different rhythm to the English rhythm, but the joy is when you kind of get it to work, so it looks like it's all just happening

KIRUNA: Mmm

AMANDA: and that's the work that happens in rehearsal, but it's also a joyful thing, because what's lovely is when you come out of the show and children are coming out going, thinking they can sign and they can understand sign because they've had this translation going on side by side and they do, they think they can, they understand BSL which is brilliant?

GARETH: Well, it's been really lovely to have some time with you to talk about it and, as always, I feel completely enlightened by your work and your words,

KIRUNA: Thank you very much!

AMANDA: Thank you very much.

WENDY: Thank you

AMANDA: Indeed, yes

GARETH: This podcast was produced by Little Commitment and edited by Pete Gledhill.

KIRUNA: This was a DaDaFest 2020 Commission.