

Power Not Pity Podcast goes to Edinburgh Fringe

SPEAKERS

Kieron, Caroline Jeyaratnam-Joyner, James McKenzie, Colin Cox, Jennifer Vaudrey, Holly Gifford, Nadia Nadaraja (via BSL interpreter), Speaker 2, Cordelia, Lewis Bray, Lindsey McLean, Ed Haynes, Denise Kennedy, Speaker 1, Holly Delefortrie

Denise Kennedy

Hi, hello, this is Denise Kennedy, access and support coordinator for DaDa. I'm here with Jennifer Vaudrey, who's part of our production team, and we are just about set off for Edinburgh.

Jennifer Vaudrey

Yes, we are! Very excited.

Denise Kennedy

Yeah, we've got lots of things planned, things shows to see, people to meet, and what's on your radar when you're up there?

Jennifer Vaudrey

So I'm very excited about a few shows I'm seeing, one of which is Ohio, and it's a play produced by Francesca Moody with a disabled couple from Ohio, and it will be incorporating music, captioning and also some sound looping. It's had five star reviews, very excited about that.

Denise Kennedy

Sounds wonderful.

Jennifer Vaudrey

Yeah.

Denise Kennedy

I'm specifically interested around access and creative, creatively integrated shows, and where access is part of, part and parcel of the shows.

Jennifer Vaudrey

Yeah and Zoo are doing a lot of that this year in their venue, so I'm really excited about heading there.

Denise Kennedy

Planning to meet up with some of the people and Extant are working with Zoo up in Edinburgh. So hopefully going to have some great chats, which you will be listening to as part of this, but yeah, hope you enjoy the podcast.

Denise Kennedy

So I finally arrived in Edinburgh, hot foot off the train this morning, and the first show that I've been to see is by the wonderful Lewis Bray, who's an old Liverpool mucker, along with his wife, Claudia, who's teching for him. And so yeah, Lewis, 'Cartoonopolis'. It seems a bit familiar to me, because it's, it's happened before, hasn't it?

Lewis Bray

Sure has. It happened 10 years ago. So this is our 10 year anniversary, and we decided this year, with some serious help and nudging from my wife Cord we should come and try the Edinburgh Fringe. And we were lucky, we applied to the Arts Council for some redevelopment funding, but we've been saving up for a long time to actually come back to the fringe, so it all kind of seemed to fall into the right place at the right time, and...

Denise Kennedy

Fantastic.

Denise Kennedy

Amazing, because obviously, you know, it's a lifelong relationship you've got with your brother, isn't it?

Denise Kennedy

Yeah, but cartoonopolis is one of the steadfast things as as you are, and his family is in his life. And can I just ask a question? Was it planned, or was it coincidence that you ended up playing at the Jack Dome?

Lewis Bray

It sure is.

Lewis Bray

Here we are, 10 years on.

Lewis Bray

Wow, I really wanted to play at the Pleasant Stone. Any of any of the venues would have been fantastic. But when the email came through from Johnny at the pleasant that was that we'd had Jack Dome, it was just like he he was just so excited about it. I think that's what's been the biggest thing this time, is that the first time around, is that Jack and mum and dad were a bit more hesitant, because they didn't know, like, I was putting their life on stage, and like, frightening and like, oh, what they're gonna say? How's it going to be? What's it going to look like? And I think what has been magical this time is that we've been able to involve Jack in such a different way, and his understanding of autism this time.

Denise Kennedy

Absolutely, and we ought, we ought to, sorry to interrupt, though, what we need to explain is, is Jack and, you know, and the story and why? Why? Why this story is so important?

Lewis Bray

Well, I think, I think for me, it all started in the back garden, because that's where Jack finds his safe place. That's his like, where he goes out to stim and play and emotionally regulate. And it was at that point, when he was 17 years old, he told me about this imaginary world that he's got.

Denise Kennedy

Yeah.

Lewis Bray

And I was just like, so excited about by that. And I was training as an actor at the Everyman in Liverpool at the time, and I brought that idea to them, and they said, "Right, okay, all right, cool. There's a little bit of seed funding. Let's see what happens from here." And it's just grown and grown and grown. And to be brutally honest, as well, like what we didn't have 10 years ago is access to to charities and to access coordinators, and the knowledge that is beginning to come through now is so fantastic, and we're so like excited to be able to implement that change.

Denise Kennedy

Yes.

Lewis Bray

Into the show, and to show that like the show was made 10 years ago, but even we can update language, even we can update...

Denise Kennedy

absolutely,

Lewis Bray

you know, all of these sorts of things.

Denise Kennedy

So how important is access, then? Because, obviously, it's gone on a bit of a journey itself, hasn't it? And they and the importance about access,

Lewis Bray

I think, I think access is really important, not only for the people who are telling the stories, but the people who are writing the stories, acting in them, talking about buildings as well. Making provisions like access isn't just an afterthought. It's not just a PR move like these are the things we should be implementing into our rooms, on our stages, on our screens, because this is how that's how we have change. And it's that's not just because we want to be treated differently. We just want to be treated equally and have our stories told because, you know, I'm going to go out on the limb and say this, the

industry wants to tell our stories, because we've got fantastic stories to tell, but we have to be treated equally, and that's really important.

Denise Kennedy

Absolutely, it's difficult. If you can't, if you can't get into the room to tell your story, then it's not, it's not going to happen. Is it? Yes, fantastic. So you're here at the fringe and for the whole month?

Lewis Bray

Sure, are we're here live at the Jack Dome for the whole month. We are doing 20, 23, performances. I just looked at my producer there for anybody who's listening in, yeah, and we're having a fantastic time. I just want to say as well to everyone that has reached out and has shared anything around Cartoonopolis while we've been up at Edinburgh. I just want to say a big thank you. It has meant so much to us and to you guys as well. Platforming us in this way, it's so awesome. And artists help artists.

Denise Kennedy

You're welcome. It's very handy that it's actually a cracking show as well. You're a fantastic entertainer and writer, and I know you've worked with couple of people we know over the years on is it Matt Rutter and Tom?

Lewis Bray

Chris Tomlinson

Denise Kennedy

Chris Tomlinson, yeah, so you know the dream team really.

Lewis Bray

Yeah, it was. It was great to get them back after sort of 10 years, and get the band back together, as it were, and get in a room and pull it apart, you know, take what we had as a 90 minute show and chop it and make it ready for Edinburgh. And I think, for me...

Denise Kennedy

yeah,

Lewis Bray

It's my favourite version of the show. I love. I've loved all the versions. But for me, this is the one that puts Jack and my mum and dad, front and centre.

Denise Kennedy

Wonderful to hear his voice in the mix, there really is. So we had our 40th DaDa. I am Denise from DaDa, the access and support coordinator, I forgot to say. And we had our recently, our 40th anniversary, and our theme was rage. And you know, that came from people out there that there was a lot to still rage about, and I'm sure there must have been elements of rage over the years for you. I mean, we saw it on stage, but kind of we're also thinking there are moments of joy and something

beautiful that comes out of some of the struggle. I know it sounds a bit counterintuitive, but what do you what do you reckon?

Lewis Bray

I think autistic joy and neuro divergent joy within families and within people who are autistic themselves is one of the most important things to platform. We don't see enough of it. We see a lot of infantilization. We see a lot of head tilting. We see a lot of 'ahhs' and this and like to actually have the space to put on stage someone having autistic joy and feeling their feelings, owning their own feelings, and having the space to be who they are is to me, and getting to see Jack do that,

Denise Kennedy

yes,

Lewis Bray

over the course of 10 years has has been phenomenal, and that is the biggest thing I've got out of this project. Don't get me wrong, I love getting on stage, yes, playing with my family and doing all of that, but to watch him grow and learn and become himself despite any sort of struggles that my parents have had, because my mum always said, Please don't make this a miserable show. Jack is not a miserable person. He's a great person,

Denise Kennedy

Yes.

Lewis Bray

So yeah, you're right. There is rage there, but the rage turns into joy. As it always does.

Denise Kennedy

So one more thing, Lewis. How have you been using access in this updated version of Cartoonopolis?

Lewis Bray

Well, access has been really important to us. Specifically, first, we brought on a lady called Rachel Barry, who is our access coordinator, and kind of, from there, we've kind of gone out really so we've put on board integrated audio description. We have I'm just looking at my producer.

Denise Kennedy

Who is Cordelia, not Claudia, as I recently said.

Lewis Bray

Would you be able to come and have a bit of a chat?

Cordelia

Yeah, absolutely. So, yeah, Rachel's been brilliant and really instrumental in kind of bringing access into the rehearsal room for us, and particularly for Lewis, as a neurodivergent artist himself.

Lewis Bray

She's awesome.

Cordelia

She is awesome. We've also worked with the brilliant Mandy Redvers-RowE, and Mandy came in to the room with us and was our integrated audio description consultant. And that essentially means that there is audio description integrated into the script of the show now, so that visually impaired audiences and Deaf audiences, not Deaf audiences, so that visually impaired and audiences can enjoy the show and understand the show. We also have in Edinburgh a couple of captioned performances, and we have a relaxed performance guide as well as a companion zine, so there will be relaxed performances throughout.

Denise Kennedy

Wonderful.

Cordelia

They were in Edinburgh as well.

Denise Kennedy

Wonderful.

Lewis Bray

Yeah, and the zine has been made by a wonderful person called Rebecca Ellis, who is autistic herself, and she's made a companion piece to go along with the show, which is all available and findable on Instagram, on the links.

Denise Kennedy

I noticed there was a physical version, so I'm going to grab one myself and have a have a look at that. Wonderful and I wish you all all the best of luck. You shouldn't have to be it shouldn't have to be luck. Should it? Because it's it's a quality show, and it's a really important story and narrative to be, to be talking, and for us to change things, and for it to be mainstream. So all the best. Thank you very much.

Denise Kennedy

I've just turned up to outside the venue 498 which is Deaf Action. They're holding their annual Edinburgh Deaf Festival. It's a two week event, and this year, they've had significant funding increase, which is fantastic. Unfortunately, their wheelchair access, their lift has broken and it can't be repaired, so it has to be replaced, and unfortunately, they had to apply to Edinburgh Council to get permission to have a replacement, and it won't be ready in time. So unfortunately for people who struggle with steps or use a wheelchair it's inaccessible, which is it must be absolutely devastating for them. Suitcase coming by. So anyway, I've just been to see 'Ivory Cutlery', which is a lovely, quaint singer with an integrated signing and physical clowning. And that was, that was delightful. Ivor Cutler songs she was singing, also playing with and playing with the audience. Yeah, it was, it was lovely. It's really, really sweet. And I'm now coming to see Gavin Lilley, who's a stand up, Deaf stand up comedian, and later I'll be seeing, I've got to get the title right of this for this, because it's quite a long one. It's 'Deaffy Drag

Queenie: Glitter, Gags and GSV', which I'm really looking forward to. It looks like a bit of a laugh. So, yeah, I'm just gonna go in now and maybe get a drink and looking forward.

Denise Kennedy

Hi, I'm at Deaf Action. And I'm with Nadia Nadaraja, who is this year's Edinburgh Deaf Festival programmer. Hello Nadia. Fantastic to be here. What a fantastic festival you've put on here.

Nadia Nadaraja (via BSL interpreter)

Yeah, yes, definitely. So I just first wanted to say that I'm a BSL user because I am deaf, so that's my the language that I use. I have a BSL interpreter with me called Abby, so she's here today to speak. So if you feel like you're hearing a voice that doesn't seem like it's Nadia's voice, it's because she's an interpreter, but it is me. So here we are at Edinburgh deaf festival. We usually use the Deaf Action building here. I'm here this year to create the program. And so I've had to select different artists, different Deaf artists to be involved, or some possibly are hearing people who are working with Deaf but really, our goal is to create something that is Deaf led so we can show different shows, with our Deaf people. And that sign this year.

Denise Kennedy

Yeah, and you've done that really well. I've been here. Well, I arrived yesterday and I came straight here, and I saw Gavin Lily's stand up and the Deaffy Drag Queenie and now I've just seen the Morgan magic show with Liliana. Fantastic. All very, very different and so and also very an international edge to it, because you brought someone over from America, is that right?

Nadia Nadaraja (via BSL interpreter)

Yes, yes. So we've got a couple from America because we really believe in international here, so it's really important, obviously, that it's Deaf, that's the key. But it doesn't matter where they're from. But this festival, we obviously it's we've got Scottish aspects, but also national and international aspects, because we really want it to be Deaf led. Those are the priorities. So you have, you know, all these different skills they have for magicians. You see that they've been doing it for 40 years, and deaf magicians. We also have Gavin, who's been doing it for 15 years, doing his stand up. But it's really good to have different people here for a mixed audience of Deaf and hearing people to see those artists of different different abilities and different experiences. It's also really good for the children be able to connect with different people. You know, sometimes people don't feel like we have commonality with hearing people, but we're bringing everyone together here to be able to show them that we're all the same, Deaf and hearing people, we are all equal.

Denise Kennedy

So talking of that, how what challenges have there been in order to get the access right?

Speaker 1

So this is our fourth festival, our first challenge was thinking about, you know, 10 years ago, there was not much access, and that's the reason we set up this festival, because we that's why we wanted to connect with Edinburgh Fringe, really, to remind them that we can bring the audience. We have a Deaf audience, and we can bring them to be involved in your fringe, in festival, in all of the different things

that they provide. But also we wanted to give them education knowing how to use interpreters and captioners. And also we've set up being able to use a request service where people can request to have interpreters or captions for different shows. That was set up four years ago, and it's just improved over time. The first festival there really wasn't much, but now you see this, 70% of things have access. So you can see, really, the improvement has been vast, and it will definitely continue improving into the future.

Denise Kennedy

Yeah, and your relationship with the other Festival, the Fringe Festival and the International Festival. It's really important the links?

Speaker 1

Oh yes, definitely. We're really thankful, you know, this year we're really excited to be in partnership with Edinburgh Book Festival, as well as partnership with Summer Hall and Edinburgh the fringe, which we've had for four years. Like yesterday, we had Evie Waddle. She was here, but she's now going to be part of Summer Hall. So we're really thankful because, you know, we have those partnerships now, also the Edinburgh Arts Festival, yeah, we've got partnership with them as well. So those connections are really important.

Denise Kennedy

Well, that's fantastic. I've been coming for many, many years, and to see this develop is just wonderful. And my role with DaDaFest in Liverpool, we're really interested in keeping links with Deaf Action and the and the Edinburgh Deaf Festival, and hopefully, who knows, funding obviously, it's always comes into it, but maybe we can have have some of you down in Liverpool.

Speaker 1

Oh, I hope so. I think it would be lovely, because obviously. That's a new there's new work to be created. It's not just the fringe. It's not just in Edinburgh. We're hoping that we can go to different places, go involved in other festivals. We can recognize, be recognized in them as well.

Denise Kennedy

Yeah. Well, Nadia, thank you so much for spending the time, because I know how busy you are. So lovely. Lovely to meet you.

Denise Kennedy

I'm sitting in the access team's office with the Engagement and Access Manager Lindsay McLean, hello. Been lovely to meet you, and so I'm just been having a fantastic introduction to the huge challenges. So basically, that's my first question. So Edinburgh obviously has its own challenges, from an access point of view?

Lindsey McLean

Yeah, it's got huge amount of challenges. It's obviously very old city, and I love where the fringe happens is in the Old Town, where the buildings are very old and were built long before anybody thought it might be a nice idea or a good idea to have level access into them. And it's also a very hilly

city, lots of nice, narrow, cobbled, hilly streets. So yeah, just the geography and the history of the city can make things complicated and not very accessible.

Denise Kennedy

Yes, I believe you started your post in 2016 so what were, did you find were the main challenges based on what you've just been explaining?

Lindsey McLean

I think the challenges the the city itself, is a challenge, and the fringe itself is also a challenge. It's a really big, busy, chaotic festival with lots of moving parts, lots. Nobody's in charge of it. Nobody decides what's in the entire like the entire program. People, if you, if you want to be a venue, and you get all the correct permissions, you can be a venue. If you want to perform at the fringe, and you find a venue that's willing to host you, then you can perform at the fringe. And the fact that there's no, no one in charge of it can make it quite complicated, because no one's got an overview, and there's nobody thinking, how can we make sure this entire thing works for as many people as possible.

Denise Kennedy

Yes. I mean, it's, I believe there are over three and a half thousand shows and multiple, multiple venues, and they keep popping up all the time, don't they?

Lindsey McLean

Yeah, which is what makes it really exciting, but also challenging.

Denise Kennedy

Yes, of course. And so. Oh, yes, I hear that the I know the fringe has a central hub, which is based on candlemaker row at the moment and has for the past few years, but I believe that a new, accessible hub is going to open next year.

Lindsey McLean

Yeah, yeah. We're really fortunate to have had funding to allow us to take on a new building Infirmary Street for Fringe Central. So fringe Central is our home for artists during the festival, and we usually have to hire a space to do that, and so we're very excited that we're going to have a new building. Well, it's not a new we're going to have a new building for us, for our offices year round. There'll be space for artists year round. There'll be rehearsal spaces year round, and we'll also it will turn into fringe central during August, where we can welcome media and artists and industry to all come and to meet each other, to meet us, and to have a space of their own

Denise Kennedy

at the festival. That's fantastic. And I believe that you will also be that will be home to a changing places. Yes.

Lindsey McLean

We're gonna iLiihave our own changing places. Toilet, one of the kind of two main pillars around the whole renovation of the building and its accessibility and sustainability. So the idea is the building is

going to be it's going to we want to have it for a long time. So we want to make sure that it works for as many people for as long as possible. So it's going to be as sustainable as possible, as close to net zero is possible, and it's also going to be as accessible as it can be. So it'll be level access inside the building, and it will have a changing places, toilet that you don't need me to come into the building to use, which will hopefully open up that part of town to a new range of people.

Denise Kennedy

That's amazing. Really looking forward to seeing that, and fingers crossed I'll be coming along next year.

Lindsey McLean

I hope so.

Denise Kennedy

Yes. So just finally, Lindsey, thank thank you very much for inviting me along, and we are going to be seeing or going to go and visit the West Parliament Square where today, and I believe next Sunday, you have BSL interpreters performing for the street theatre

Lindsey McLean

That's right. So we've got BSL interpretation at the West Parliament Square. We call it a stage, but there isn't actually a stage

Denise Kennedy

Cobbled area.

Lindsey McLean

Yeah, and it's happening on the 10th, the 16th, so next Saturday. So today, next Saturday and the 21st of August, as long as the street performance is happening, we'll have the interpreters there. And that's really about, how can I spend a lot of time talking about how we don't control the festival. We're not in charge of it, but what we do control, to an extent, is the street performances, which take place on the Royal Mile. They're really iconic. They're really what a lot of people think about when they think about the festival. And there are a lot of people and a lot of folks, first experience of the festival, is walking on the Royal Mile and seeing the street performance. And so by having the interpreters there, it really opens that up to a new audience, to people who may have felt excluded from the festival in the past, and that all started a few, quite a number of years ago, at the suggestion of a street performer who felt that it would really work for that audience. And we're fortunate that Deaf Action and the Deaf Festival have really helped us, yes, to make that as accessible as it can be for Deaf people.

Denise Kennedy

Yes, you've got quite a good relationship with Deaf Action now, haven't you?

Lindsey McLean

Yeah, yeah. Well, we've done that particular project. We've done with them since it started, but we also work with them to support them, where we can with the Deaf festival, yeah, they really need a lot of support.

Denise Kennedy

No. I mean, I've been visiting their Festival this weekend, so I'm aware that they are, they have their fully, fully functioning festival all of their own. But it is, it is linked up in some way to the fringe, isn't it?

Lindsey McLean

So, a number of the shows, a number of things happening at Deaf festival are in the fringe program, so they're part of the overall fringe. And I know that it's really and I agree with them. It's very important to the Deaf festival that it happens in August, because they don't want it to become kind of a small, not very they don't want to, they want to be part of, kind of what's going on, of when things are at their busiest. And by having the Deaf Festival in August also is so beneficial to all the other festivals that take place in August, because there's now, there's a Deaf audience who are coming to Edinburgh, looking for things to do. So if and the Deaf Festival were very generous, not only do they promote what they have in their festival, but they promote what other festivals are doing. So not just at the Fringe but at the EIA, at the International Festival and at the book festivals.

Denise Kennedy

Yeah. I mean, it's marvelous, and I think that can only go on and develop that, that relationship. Well, thanks, Lindsey, it's been absolutely amazing spending some time with you, and hopefully I will bump into you over the next few days, but if not, I'll see you next year.

Lindsey McLean

Oh, brilliant. Thank you. It's been lovely.

Denise Kennedy

Yeah, all right, thanks.

Denise Kennedy

So I'm in the bar at Zoo south side with James McKenzie, morning.

James McKenzie

Morning. How are you?

Denise Kennedy

Yeah, good. Thank you. Another day. So, introduce yourself.

James McKenzie

So I'm James McKenzie, the artistic director of Zoo, and we're in one of our two venues, zoo, so

Denise Kennedy

Fantastic. And so I'm particularly interested in having a chat with you about the work that you've been doing with Extant around the visual impairment and accessibility?

James McKenzie

Yeah, so we have been working with extant all the way through the whole of this year, in the lead up to the festival, to find ways of making all of our shows accessible in some way for people with visual impairment, and that's taken on various forms. Extant are providing enhanced support to three of our shows, which is a touch tour, enhanced program notes, scripts available in Braille for those shows. So that's fantastic. And then what we've done is, outside of that, we've challenged our other shows to find ways of making their shows accessible to those with visual impairments. So what we've asked every company to do is either do very simple self description at the top of the show, which they'll do daily and live, or record an audio introduction, which the majority of companies have chosen to do. They're all available on our website. Or, thirdly, some of the shows have opted to have their show fully audio described on one or two occasions during the festival. So yeah, that's kind of what we've been trying to do. So it's a range of things, not the same for every show, but hopefully every show in the program will in some way be accessible.

Denise Kennedy

That's a wonderful commitment. And what challenges have you come across?

James McKenzie

I think lots of challenges people's time is extra time, even when it's not extra cost. People have found it difficult because they have a lot of other things to do. Some of our international companies are just bemused by the whole thing, because they don't have a culture of this in at all in their country, and they literally write back with a what question mark, because they just it's just not something they've ever encountered. Interestingly, particularly dance shows, which we have quite a lot, some international dance companies just can't understand why someone who can't see it would want to be in the performance. And they find the whole thing like odd, and you have to spend a lot of time explaining it, and then they're really into it, and they love the idea it's just for them. It's just not something they've ever encountered. So I think that's a challenge, but I think, yeah, generally, it's about time. When people are bringing shows to the fringe, they're very stressed. It's a very stressful period, and access is something they love the sound of at the beginning, but it's probably the first thing that to fall by the wayside. So what we've tried to do is make it as easy as possible, so they don't have to, you know.

Denise Kennedy

Of course, yeah, and it's, it's fantastic that you are involved in this project. I'm going to be coming along to the playground venue tomorrow to see Big Little Sister. They're one of the enhance program for Extant they've been working on.

James McKenzie

Yeah, yeah. So Holly, who created Big Little Sister, which is a really powerful, funny, clever piece of theatre. She's yes, working with Extant to create an enhanced show. So that's like, that's going to be really incredible. I think it's really good to be able to offer that to early career artists, people who are right at the beginning of their career. And playground is like our hub for emerging artists part. I think it's

really important that we get in, if we build access in early on in people's career, then they just carry on doing it forever. I think when it's I think it's it's more challenging for the more established companies who have maybe never thought about it, because when they started 20, 30, years ago, it wasn't a thing for them, should have been a thing, wasn't a thing. And so now it feels like you're creating work. I think what's great is that the early career artists, if you, if you embed it early in their practice, they'll carry on doing it for the rest of their career, and it won't, it won't be an add on or an afterthought. It will just be something that happens always when they make work.

Denise Kennedy

Yes, I think, as an access coordinator myself, I find that I agree that the earlier you can embed any access in, the better it will be for any any product.

James McKenzie

Yeah, and I think, I think if we can embed it, the fringe is obviously challenging landscape, because everything, every venue, is temporary. Everything is temporary. Everything is slightly stressful. Things go wrong, things change at moments notice. But again, we could just carry on embedding it as the norm. I think the biggest challenge we have is that, as I said earlier, that everyone, everyone is very keen at the beginning,

Denise Kennedy

Yes.

James McKenzie

Because it sounds like a good thing to do. When they register their shows for the ED fringe program, there are boxes they can tick. And everyone says, I'm going to do a BSL show, I'm going to do a audio described show, I'm going to do a relaxed show. And they all tick all the boxes. And then when it actually comes down to it, well, when are you going to do that? And then slowly, they're like, Oh, actually, no we haven't got the money. And we go. So the challenge is, how do we support as venues? How do we support those artists to like, make that a reality,

Denise Kennedy

To be actually thinking about that before they even apply to the fringe.

Denise Kennedy

Yes, yes, it's how you communicate that isn't it. Well, thanks so much, James for taking time out of your I know, busy day. Yeah, and best of luck with it all. And anyway, I'm probably going to see you a bit later, maybe. Yes. All right.

James McKenzie

Yeah, a little bit. And also, I mean, interestingly, one of our audio describers, who's wonderful, was saying to me last night, oh, it's a real shame that, you know, the audio described shows aren't listed in the printed program. Printed program goes to print in April, yeah. And most shows just can't think that far ahead, but she's right, because we're missing an audience that doesn't know it's happening. So again, the websites are constantly updated, but at which point are people checking So, yeah, there's a,

there's a, there is a challenge around forward thinking and how we that's very specific to this kind of festival that I think in a more established theatre program, you might have one or two nights of a show, and you can, you know, six months out, know that something's going to be audio described, and that's very, very clear it's organized, but I think with the fringe being programmed very quickly, and then a week after the program deadline, everyone has to have signed off their program entry, and then it's in print. Just no time to think, yes, yeah. So obviously the online stuff helps, because it means we can constantly update, but I'm not sure our audience know that it's constantly been updated. So we've got challenges around that.

James McKenzie

All right. Thanks

Denise Kennedy

Thank you.

Denise Kennedy

So I'm outside at Zoo playground venue with the lovely Holly Gifford, who has agreed to have a little chat with me. Just seen your show, Holly, Big Little Sister, I thought it was absolutely wonderful. Could you just give us a little bit of background?

Holly Gifford

To the show. Yeah. So the way I've been describing it is Big Little Sister is a story about a sibling who has grown up in the someone else's shadow, that shadow being her big brother with disabilities. And I tell the story of me and my big brother, Patrick, through lots of like multimedia, through like projections, monologues speaking to his voice, because I actually program his communication aid in real life, so I have access to his voice, so he has lines to say, and the whole,

Denise Kennedy

Sorry.

Holly Gifford

I've got some lovely background noise going on.

Denise Kennedy

But hey, let's go. Let's go with it.

Holly Gifford

And it's all about how we tell stories around disability and who they're for and who tries to silence us currently, this noise in the background.

Denise Kennedy

We may have to move.

Holly Gifford

But I think that's um, yeah, the sort of it I try and tell our story, yeah, and I don't want to massively spoil it, but um, it's sort of the difficulty you run into and who you're telling that story for, and that's sort of what I tackle by the midpoint of the show.

Denise Kennedy

Absolutely. Yeah, no, it was wonderful. And you have been working with Extant, haven't you? And they've been their enhance program, yeah, go on. Tell us a bit about that.

Holly Gifford

I'm one of three shows that they've been working with at Zoo. So I work with them on, yeah, so it's enhanced, is what they did on my show. So it's like, post enhanced, and it means that, like, I'd already fully made the show by the time that I was then working with them. And it's like, first I did visual impairment awareness training with them, and then I went into like, learning about doing like a touch tour and program notes. So this performance is designed for the visually impaired. And an hour before the show today, I ran program notes and a touch tour so I would run through the show, sort of like explaining any elements that really are important to the story, which rely on, like visual cues that I wouldn't be able to sort of like, tell otherwise. There are moments. So this performance, like, isn't technically audio described, but for me, as I was working with them, I was running through, and this play is quite funny, and I don't want, for me, I wouldn't want an audience member to not be in on the joke at the time that I'm delivering it. So there were parts where I was audio describing because I was like, I want this joke to land for everyone at exactly the same time. So I was running through the entire show, which is actually so fun, because the Oh, very loud, because, sorry about this, listeners, because the show itself is so silly. And so actually, the program notes is really quite funny. And then the touch tour for me, it's really like stripped back set that I have. I basically had nothing other than a microphone stand. So the touch tour consisted of a lot of the like costume elements of the show. So part of my costume a fan I hold. I'm dressed up as my parents in drag within the show. So it was my dad's beard and wig that also got passed around. And then I invited audience members up on stage to have a walk around and get a sense of the space that I'll be performing in, yeah. And then I went into the show, and that's sort of the work I've been doing with, yeah, Extant, which is, it's really great because it's, um, it's really easy to apply to a lot of shows. And it also means that if I was to ever take this on tour, I would be able to use the same program notes and touch tour. And I think it's a way that it can be quite low budget, but still means that you're always making your show accessible and really, like for me, and I don't want this to sort of downplay the way it's actually really low effort. Like, I think all it takes is, like, someone, like, a willingness to, like, try and arrange it. And I really hope that more shows start taking this on and start applying their work, because I think it's really important that you're reaching the right audiences. For me with my show, it was, like, integral that I was reaching these audiences, because I'm like, well, then who am I telling this story for otherwise? That's the whole point of the show.

Denise Kennedy

Well, you had a group of in the audience who've been working with Extant. Is it a focus group? So had you met them at all?

Holly Gifford

No, I hadn't. I didn't even know that they were a focus group, but I knew that there was a lot of people there with it. Yeah, I didn't know whether they were employees or have been invited along? But now good to know they were a focus group.

Denise Kennedy

Yeah, so they're, I think, I don't know what you call it, critical friends? But it basically the audience, that it's that you're making the show for people with visual impairment. So that was really interesting. And be interested to find out what they think, yeah, talking of which, how's your family taking it? How's Patrick and your parents? Because obviously, it's your whole life.

Speaker 2

Patrick likes doing what he likes to do. He would not enjoy sitting in a theatre, even in a relaxed show for that amount of time. He's quite an active person, but he really enjoyed visiting Edinburgh. He really likes flyering because he loves talking to people in the street. So that was quite a good job for him, as long as he was able to do it somewhere near traffic. He likes being around cars, yes, but he feels all right with the show. I've tried to talk to him about it, and he's tried to tell me instead he would like to talk about the dogs he's met. Hey, you got to try. But my parents, my parents have both seen it, and they both really like it. They're both very proud of it.

Denise Kennedy

And is it going on tour, or do you plan or would you like to?

Holly Gifford

I would like to. I'd like to massively, I think, and without getting sort of too into it, like the Edinburgh audience, and the fact I was able to perform to this specific audience in Edinburgh was really amazing. But this festival is so expensive, and that is also changing which audiences can come and attend the show. Obviously, you've always going to have Edinburgh locals, but particularly people getting the train up or flying in and visiting. It is the costs are going up and up for accommodation, for travel. And for me, like I would, I am very happy to present this to this current Edinburgh audience, but I would really like to be able to take it to places where there are people that haven't been able to come up to Edinburgh, yeah?

Denise Kennedy

Because Edinburgh, yeah, Edinburgh. I mean, it's a huge access issue anyway, in itself, broad stroke access to Edinburgh, you know, we can't all afford it.

Holly Gifford

Yeah. But then also, even access around Edinburgh, one of the siblings I was interviewing for the show. Her sister is a wheelchair user, and she was like, it's really hard, because she used to live in Edinburgh, and she was like, and just like, even getting the maps around, there's so many like, bridges here, we've been like, stairs that maps are going to try and take you down, because, like, the city is constantly basically on two levels. It makes it really hard to navigate. However, I did discover that Ubers are quite a lot cheaper here. So when my family were visiting, I was like, hey, if it's only four pounds to go and get somewhere, I'll pay for the luxury of getting all of us in a taxi.

Denise Kennedy

That's good. Okay. Well, thanks so much, Holly. I think the show is extraordinary, and I think it deserves a bigger audience and a tour, and somebody's just starting to eat their lunch now, but so I think that that's our sign to sign off, but really, really lovely to meet you, and best of luck with the rest of it.

Holly Gifford

Thank you so much.

Denise Kennedy

So I'm outside Zoo south side with Caroline Jeyaratnam-Joyner and of Extant. And so I'm really, I suppose, I suppose I'm asking, What does Extant do? What do you what's your role?

Caroline Jeyaratnam-Joyner

Okay, so Extant has been running approximately 27 years, and Maria Oshodi, our artistic director, set it up. It's kind of like the leading visually impaired Theatre Company across England and in the UK. We're funded by Arts Council England. Primarily. I work on enhance, which is funded by Paul Hamlin Foundation. And we look at access within shows. We can have enhance for a pre production, which could be embedded audio description into the script, for example. But the shows, the three we're doing here in Edinburgh is post production. So recently, we've just worked with Holly Gifford. Her show is this morning, and we worked with her through training in visual impairment awareness training and touch or training to present this lovely touch tour this morning, which is half an hour long, including her presenting program notes that get to the essence of her show, and also the touch tour, making the tactile and immersive nature of the touch tool so that people feel ready to go into the show and they know kind of key visual clue cues of the work. So we've got two more coming up. One today, I think this could work for about to have our touch tour for that. Tomorrow we've got small town boys their touch tour, and then the show. So all those three companies, we've worked with them very carefully, training them in the social model, disability equality act 2010, and sight guiding, and then the touch tour training, where we get creative and look at how they can really connect with their show in that half hour touch tour to make a visually impaired audience really engaged from the minute they walk in to touch tour and then really engaging with the show itself.

Denise Kennedy

Yeah, I saw Holly's show, Big Little Sister this morning. Absolutely fantastic. An extraordinary show, and she's an extraordinary performance. Former So, yeah, I should have a lovely chat with her. Yeah. So you're working with, I believe you're working with the Everyman in Liverpool, correct?

Caroline Jeyaratnam-Joyner

So the Paul Hamlin projects across three years. This is year two, and so the Liverpool Everyman has signed up to be one of our venues for this year. So they will be doing three enhanced shows with us. The first one is going to be enhanced Romeo and Juliet. So that's in the autumn. I believe it's first of October. So we're working up to that. So we're running, we've done the visual impairment awareness training for the venue stuff. Then we will do it for the creative team and people working in the show. And

then they'll have their touch tour in their show on the first of October, leading up to the touch tour, we'll have a meeting standing around the cafe bar on the same day, bringing our visually impaired audiences and to create a buzz in the in the building. And we want sort of longevity and strategic approach to, you know, engaging visually impaired audiences.

Denise Kennedy

Oh right, fantastic. And we're looking forward to, I'm sure we'll come along see the Everyman show, definitely. So you've been also working with two AD consultants, haven't you

Caroline Jeyaratnam-Joyner

As in audio describer?

Denise Kennedy

Yes, or disability awareness. I know Anthony Goff is...

Caroline Jeyaratnam-Joyner

So the three of our shows in Edinburgh this year, the one this morning with Holly Gifford. Her consultant was Michelle Felix, who worked on the program notes. Anthony Goff has worked on the program notes this afternoon's touch touring show, which is, I think it could work with circus show, and actually has also worked for the one tomorrow, which is small town boy an LGBTQI+ show with a touch tour. Both of them are here at South Side Zoo. Both of the touch tours are in the cab bar, and then we go to the venue upstairs.

Denise Kennedy

Brilliant. So we're going to go and experience that touch tour now, aren't we? So thanks so much Caroline for taking the time to chat.

Caroline Jeyaratnam-Joyner

A lot of our facilitators also are advocates, and we pay them to do the audience development behind the scenes. So this morning, Kieran was at the touch touring show, and Kieran has been working behind the scenes, talking to all her networks across Scotland, visually impaired colleagues and friends and networks. She's drummed up a lot of interest in the three and a half shows, and that advocacy works also what our facilitators, such as Anthony and Kieran do for us.

Caroline Jeyaratnam-Joyner

That's okay. One more thing...

Denise Kennedy

Yes?

Denise Kennedy

Thank you so much.

Denise Kennedy

I'm sitting outside south side. It's a beautifully hot, sunny day. I'm with the founder member of VIX. Hello.

Kieron

Hi. I'm Kieran. I'm just going to give you a quick description of myself. I'm a four foot 10 Asian woman. I'm wearing a blue summery dress because it's a fantastic warm weather in Edinburgh. So what is VIX? Visually impaired creator Scotland. I know we have a long name. We couldn't get vix.co.uk How annoying. But basically, we support all visually impaired creatives in Scotland, be they performers, visual artists, anything to do with creativity and art, we support them in lots of ways, doing a newsletter, getting out job opportunities, making sure we make our own work, and connecting up with other organisations. We do cover the whole of Scotland, which, again, is insane, and I know, but it's actually really exciting. Scotland's amazing country to be in, and we have the highlands right the way through to the big cities, and every visually impaired person that we can meet, we try and connect with and support. The key thing about us is we employ visually impaired people in all our key roles, and we make sure that everyone that we work with is paid one way or another. So...

Denise Kennedy

That's wonderful.

Kieron

Anybody out there in Scotland wants to join us? Please do.

Denise Kennedy

Wow, that's amazing, very, very important work you're doing. It's I believe, that you are involved with Extant and they enhance program.

Kieron

Yeah, we're delighted to be taking part in with Extant on the enhanced program here at Zoo venue, and we're trying to make sure that all the shows along with Extant, who have been key to supporting and making this happen is make sure all the stories are accessible using an information called enhance which I'm sure later on, people from Extant will explain, but it's been great working with them. We've had a good time. We've all learned a lot together.

Denise Kennedy

Yes, so you've I noticed I went to see Big Little Sister this morning. Fantastic show. How was it for you? And noticed that you were all in the audience.

Kieron

It was really brilliant. I thought Holly did an amazing job. Obviously, she'd had lots of brilliant training from Extant she did an incredible job in making sure that the pre show notes were exciting, engaging, interesting and relevant, and that made it the whole experience much more fun. It flew by the touch tour. Sometimes you go on some touch tours and kind of think, I want to get up on that stage and I want to rummage. But this one felt really warm, friendly and fantastic,

Denise Kennedy

Great. And we're going to be joining you. Me and my colleague Ed Haynes are going to be joining you in the next touch tour for the next show, and that starts in about 10 minutes. I think so. Thank you so much for speaking to me.

Denise Kennedy

Finally, the day has arrived. Our first drop in, DaDa drop in at Fringe Central, and we've just set up, and there's Ed Haynes, hello, Ed.

Ed Haynes

Hello

Denise Kennedy

And myself and Paul, our interpreter, who's having a chat with a performer that he's worked with over in the corner, that we'll maybe we'll chat to in a sec. And I'm but I'm here with Colin Cox, who are you and where'd you come from?

Colin Cox

I mean, I live in California, in LA. I mean, I am British by birth. My dad was Scottish. My grandmother's from Edinburgh. My mother was Irish. But I now work and live in LA in the TV and theatre and film industry, and I'm here to do a play about Shakespeare.

Denise Kennedy

Oh, wow.

Denise Kennedy

Okay, and you've, actually, you've just given us a flyer for it, which looks really good. Yeah. So you work with Deaf children.

Colin Cox

I do in and out. I'll get called in, especially if there's Deaf actors. They want to study Shakespeare, because I learned ASL, yes, that I can go in and work with them. And I know the ASL so it's a beautiful story how this came about because I was called by a friend of mine. She works with the Deaf community, and she had, it's, you'll love this thing. She had a person who wanted to play Othello. Now, he had played for the Lakers. He was a basketball player that played for the Lakers. Name's Don Mines. He's like, six foot nine tall, but it was his dream to play Othello. And so she called me. She said, I have this guy, and he wants to play Othello. And I said, okay, but he's Deaf, right? And I said, Okay. And so they got me a translator. And as we were working, I could see he was very frustrated, and I realised the translator didn't know how to translate the Shakespeare, right? And so he was like, so after the session, I sat down with Don and I said, if you want to play Othello, you have to teach me sign language. And he did. He went chair table, like two months. And as he did that, I interpreted the Shakespeare into sign language, and he performed the following sign language.

Denise Kennedy

So would you consider that to be something of joy and beauty?

Colin Cox

Absolutely!

Denise Kennedy

Yeah, that's wonderful.

Colin Cox

It was an incredible story, and we're still great friends. Yes, you know he had...the irony of his story was he had been drafted by UNLV Las Vegas, and then the Lakers drafted him as a professional basketball player, and then they had trouble getting the signals into him. He moved on, but he became an actor, and he always wanted to play Othello, and he got to play Othello.

Denise Kennedy

Amazing story, yes, yes. So, I mean, we just had our 40th anniversary, and the theme of our festival was rage, but, but we in amongst that, you know, you can find moments of joy and things of beauty.

Colin Cox

I can tell you that if anybody is entitled to rage, it's Donald, and he doesn't. He doesn't. He moves forward. He takes the challenge. He goes where am I going to find somebody to teach me? Yes, Othello I mean, I he's six foot nine. He's a giant of a man, but he's such a beautiful, beautiful human being, really, really, anybody entitled to rage would be Donald.

Denise Kennedy

Yes.

Colin Cox

And he doesn't carry it. I'm sure he has dark moments, like we all do, but he's this gigantic, radiant of hope, beautiful man.

Denise Kennedy

We look to find not just something beautiful, beautiful, but people who are beautiful, who, you know, who are joyous, I suppose. And he's absolutely one. Well, thanks, Colin, thank you for that.

Colin Cox

You're very welcome.

Denise Kennedy

I am with the Della...

Holly Delefortrie

Holly Delefortrie

Denise Kennedy

Holly Delefortrie. I knew I'd get that wrong. So you've just been saying that you've been you've been working with, well, you explain.

Holly Delefortrie

Absolutely. So I've worked as practitioner for sort of over the past 10 years with different learning disabled communities, and I'm neurodivergent myself. I'm severely dyslexic, and an artist and theatre maker, making shows around dyslexia currently, which we're looking to tour. But yeah, my background is in access and supporting people with different additional needs, basically creating spaces for them within different community settings.

Denise Kennedy

You say that you are going to be working with told by an idiot?

Holly Delefortrie

Yeah, so I've worked with Told by an idiot since 2021, with the get happy touring projects. I've been with them for four or five years, and I do sort of a lot of their kind of same community workshop sessions. I've developed a specific workshop for the company to make, sort of their kind of like main talk by an idiot sort of strand, have an access focus session, basically. And we're looking also to work with different bushy pairs and sort of blind and Deaf communities as well.

Denise Kennedy

So yes, so we were talking about finding moments of joy and something beautiful, and it's what, what can, what's your thinking interpretation around that? So out of the out of all the problems and the rage that goes that goes on.

Holly Delefortrie

I think it's understanding. I think it's about asking people is like, what do you need to most sort of, like, be able to access something or understand something? And it's like, it's about more empathy and more speaking and more talking and more things like this, where we get a place to do that. Yeah. I also think in terms of celebrating the gifts that certain like, learning disabilities and difference brings. I think it's really beautiful. And I think there's some incredible people out there that have gone through all sorts of different struggles in their life. However, I remember one artist when we were working on get happy was like: "we're not the poor people, we're the I mean, we're the happy people. We're the ones that are truly happy". Because I think it's like that understanding of like, real acceptance and understanding and celebration of what you have and what you have to offer, and also how your brain works and functions, or how you physically are sort of able to kind of move and coordinate with the world. But I think, yeah, I just think celebrating the positives, like the learning disabled community as well as the struggles, is really important. I think especially with dyslexia, I could probably speak a little bit more personally about it, but like being severely dyslexic, I think there's something around sort of like unseen learning disabilities that tend to get sort of overlooked and slightly overshadowed. It's one of the most common learning disabilities out there. But yeah, I think there's so much still to be said about how we can support adults with learning disabilities, particularly if they're unseen or neurodivergent needs. And obviously there's such a rise in it. It's like, how do we balance that and support that? So, yeah.

Denise Kennedy

I thought that was interesting, what you said about celebrating the difference and the way that difference, different neural pathways can end up in a very different and creative outcome. And that's, that's something beautiful.

Holly Delefortrie

I think it's just understanding, and it's giving people platforms to understand how they work. Do you know what I mean? I think that's part of the big, sort of like barrier. I think some people just don't have that knowledge, which obviously you wouldn't necessarily, unless you've been given it. Do you know what I mean? And I think that's, that's the key, and I think it's open conversations without fear of getting it wrong, and sort of just educating people more about it. And I think it's really important, you know, keep championing sort of learning disabled led, you know, kind of performance facilitators, do you know what I mean? That can do those conversations those spaces, because that's what is needed. You know, that healing level of conversation.

Denise Kennedy

Thanks Holly, that's lovely. no, not at all. How amazing was that? Jen,

Jennifer Vaudrey

Oh, it was wonderful. We've seen some incredible things. We met some beautiful people. It was fantastic.

Denise Kennedy

Lots of recommendations, and some of these shows going to be touring in the next 12 months, so hopefully you'll be able to catch some of them if you're in the right city,

Jennifer Vaudrey

And hopefully we'll be able to get some of them to be as part of the next DaDaFest, which I'm very much hopeful for from some of the conversations that we've had.

Denise Kennedy

Yeah, absolutely, that'll be spring 2027 Yeah, so we'll be working towards that from now on. But yeah, hope you enjoyed the podcast. And yeah.

Jennifer Vaudrey

Have a great sleep as well. Denise, very busy,

Denise Kennedy

Exhausted. How hot was Edinburgh this year? I mean, weather wise,

Jennifer Vaudrey

Hot as well, yeah, hot takes. We loved it.

Denise Kennedy

Absolutely, all right. Bye.

Jennifer Vaudrey

Thanks bye.