



Library podcast

The Deaf Movement and Musical Theater

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[00:00:36] Welcome everyone. My name is Bob Tang the music librarian here at Seattle Public Library. And I want to thank you all for coming to this presentation Cole presentation with the library with Fifth Avenue theater for their production of The Hunchback of Notre Dame. And without any further ado I'd like to welcome Orlando and Josh and E.J.. Hello. Hello. Mr.. Safe behind these windows and still. Gazing at the people down. On. My life as I write I'm hungry for the mysteries all my life I memorized things

[00:01:31] Knowing Penn State will never know.

[00:01:35] All my life I will wonder how it feels to the last day. Not above

[00:01:52] Saying hey this is what I do. Just say

[00:02:37] We send their wives through the roofs and see every day they shout scolding go about their life.

[00:02:46] Keep this up they keep telling us to be bad. Or. Since

[00:04:00] So my name is Orlando Miralis I am the Director of Education and Engagement at the Fifth Avenue theater. And on behalf of the Fifth Avenue theater thank you so much for joining us today. We're really excited to be here in partnership with Seattle Public Library and also death spotlight and we're also excited to be here as part of a year where we're learning. We're learning so much about theater and Deaf culture and much thanks to our upcoming production of The Hunchback of Notre Dame. It's been a really exciting year for us and also amazing things happening in our community. How many Y'all saw Midsummer Night's Dream. Aysel Midsummer Night's Dream sound. Yes. Give it up. So that was a wonderful production that we were excited to share our season with. And here we go. Following in your footsteps today is part of a series of panel discussions. We started this year with ragtime right time examining the change in our community what it's like to be a multicultural community here in Seattle and also during the time period when that particular musical take took

place with the Hunchback of Notre Dame. We have the opportunity to explore this growing intersection that we see now between musical theater and Deaf culture. And so does theater has a long history in the United States deaf theater does have a long history in the United States. As early as the 19th century with the university there are records of productions taking place all across the United States. In 1942 the first performance of a play by deaf actors on Broadway was a production of arsenic and lace in nineteen fifty nine. The Miracle Worker also opened up on Broadway won for Tonys.

[00:06:03] Has anybody seen production of The Miracle Worker a high school favorite now. Yeah.

[00:06:10] And I'm sure people remember productions of children of a Lesser God in the 80s.

[00:06:17] So those are all plays and there's a rich history of of death plays musical theater or even just musical theater incorporating deaf actors and artists is has not seen notoriety or not seen the kind of mainstream recognition until fairly recently. So in 2000 director Jeff Calhoun mounted a production of the musical Oliver with Jeff West and this provided a proof of concept that this is something that you can put a deaf artist together with this artform that for so long we had kind of celebrated for the aspects of music and those aspects of of the art form being largely sound based. So following that 2000 production wasn't 2003 went deaf West and also Jeff who brought to the Broadway production of. Does anybody know. In 2003 big river. Right. That's not fair. You work for the fifth avenue theaters.

[00:07:34] But yes so deaf West proud a revival of Big River to Broadway in 2003 which actually set the stage for this new wave of inclusive productions. More recently in 2015 a revival of Spring Awakening also opened at the Brooks Atkinson Theater on Broadway and I see a lot of nodding heads so you'll almost be familiar with that scene in recent history.

[00:08:02] And so our panel today is about the seemingly unlikely intersection of deaf culture and an art form that throughout its history has largely been defined by sound. And our panelists today our are Joshua Steele Ryan Schlachter and Patti Leang. And just going to go ahead and just do a quick introduction of each. So Patti is executive director of Spotlight which whose mission is to celebrate and showcase Deaf culture and American Sign Language through the arts. Ryan Schleck. Is performing artist. Amazing person and is serving as our ASL master right now on the Hunchback of Notre Dame and Reggie are you.

[00:08:56] And I'd like to say he was in big river as welshed. Just don't say that he was never on Broadway.

[00:09:03] Oh yeah. That that was going to be his surprise called Culter or his expertise there. Yes. Yeah definitely call him out for that.

[00:09:14] And also still artistic director of the spotlight.

[00:09:20] Yes yes. All right. So we're going to make you live that out for as long as we can before we lose you to Austin Texas right. Absolutely. We're so sad. And then last but not least as Joshua Castillo who is starring as quazi motto he should be here and met him.

[00:09:40] He's over there. Hey John.

[00:09:42] Yeah he's still at the theater.

[00:09:43] He got lost as starring as quasi Modo in our production of the Hunchback of Notre Dame was also in that fabled beloved 2015 production of Spring Awakening on Broadway and his instagram likes or will attest to that and follow him on Instagram.

[00:10:07] Me too. All of us you can follow us on Instagram. Great. And so I'm very thankful that all of you can join us here today. Please help me in thanking them for being on our panel.

[00:10:21] So I do actually want to say thank you to all of you for coming and having a conversation and just we can change the world with just a simple conversation and sharing ideas and so many people are here. So thank you for taking your time on a Monday evening. Thank you so much. We're going to change the world together OK.

[00:10:38] Let's do it OK.

[00:10:40] So to kick things off. My first question is about musical Peter but I do hope our conversation kind of starts to spread beyond that as as we get deeper into these issues.

[00:10:52] But I'm curious how each of you if at all had any interaction with musical theater before you got involved professionally. So did you have musicals that you were forced to watch growing up or what was your perception of musicals before you got involved professionally.

[00:11:14] Yes start. Sure. OK my parents we actually went to the library on the weekend and often we'd rent the movie musicals you know like singing in the rain and an American in Paris and you know those sort of musicals we'd rent and we would think how cool that would be to you know actually dance like that in real life. But it wasn't happening so right. So you know inside I wanted to dance but you know I wasn't so good. But definitely I supported the art and watched more movies so my first exposure to musical theater was actually with a pippin the musical that Deaf West actually did. I was involved with them and I missed Big River when it was here in L.A. so I remember the concept of just signing and singing at the same time and how that paralleled and overlapped and was just this mosaic working together and it was so visual to creating all of the meaning from the facial expressions to showcasing the language taking all of that sound and making it 3D and you know all the in fluctuations you have in the singer's voice we put on her face and both worlds both communities that benefited from working together in collaboration and just to see that and just watching Spring Awakening as well. It was amazing. I saw it. Yes you saw me Josh said and that he was such an important part of that process. Yeah I remember. Was I was there for spring awakening

in New York and I convinced my friend to fly out with me to New York to see it. We were just blown away. Absolutely. You know just kind of the rebellious teen age theme that it has and how this all just relates to who we are as growing humans. I was there at the tech tech rehearsal of Hunchback of Notre Dame and I saw Josh and gosh I just look forward to seeing more of this collaborative work. Ryan hello.

[00:13:07] My first exposure was was on MTV MTV you know on TV.

[00:13:16] You're that young. Oh my gosh. MTV

[00:13:20] Mtv MTV you know all the music videos. Yeah it was way before your time. But anyways you know a whole whole genre of music was there on MTV so you know I'd watch MTV and I'd see the singers and I'd see people dancing. And you know I did taken the beat a little bit. And you know I didn't understand the words it wasn't captioned at that time. But before technology was not as advanced that it is now so you know really as I got older and captions were more accessible and more irrelevant on TV you could see the words that you could see things in time.

[00:13:53] And I really kind of got the hang of that and got the vibe and started understanding more and wanted to learn the process and how that would pertain to me and then with dancing and with singing and words and how that all got put together I could say MTV got me started. I was born profoundly deaf 100 percent deaf. So understanding of what sound was was very foreign so it just you know receptively understanding it and seeing what I picked up given the opportunity to actually work with deaf west later on in a production of Oliver and the first production that they did. And so it was a wonderful learning experience and I gained a lot from that and just really understanding how sign can actually fit rhythmically and the technical skills that are involved with it and the collaboration with all the actors hearing and deaf and just understanding each other and you know all the moments of when and why and how and all those things we had to figure out together was a huge learning curve. Jeff Calhoun a funny story. He was the director. Yes Jeff is his name signed when he directed that play before he visited Deaf West. He was a production manager for the production manager for Deaf West actually called over and asked to meet with Ed Waterstreet. At that time to see if he might want to be a partner in that. And so we got the idea of actually setting up a musical with ESL being inclusive.

[00:15:17] And Jeff said how how would we do that.

[00:15:22] We're like all right we'll show you. So at that time we already had a production that was Streetcar Named Desire going on and that was with that was that was with Troy Kutcher who's a Deaf West actor as well. And so once we all started collaborating he came to New York and then later on in L.A. We were watching the show and we were just completely taken back with what was actually possible. It worked. It worked it wasn't just a play but it was so much more and it expanded on ideas and meaning and everything that was involved with that and everything that you can actually do with Oliver became even more so. We actually started working with him and for him it was a huge learning curve on how we can work with deaf actors and you know he was learning sign at the same time too

which was nice and the whole point is that in this production the important part was just making musical theater inclusive of a cell. It was it was just our main focus. And so I mean yes the dancing was beautiful and the lights were amazing and everything happening. It can easily be overwhelming with having the signing on the stage as well so we made sure that the signing was clear visual space the focus was on the signing not on necessarily the lights and the glamour or the glitter of it but you know and today that still carries on to other productions.

[00:16:49] Yeah I really am. As we've been working with all of these different artists and different people that are here as well. I know that we were learning so much as far as what deaf actors could do. And there was two different things going on.

[00:17:06] So we were one second for interviews to catch up.

[00:17:13] We're still in a learning process of knowing all the different things of the INS and the outs and you know there are some things that can go wrong. And you know meeting with these wonderful people. Patti I totally respect her work that she's doing in developing deaf artistry here in Seattle and taking the deaf story and taking the deaf emotion the deaf experience what that is and making sure that everybody hearing families everybody has access to that and we can all come together through music and signing. And you know I remember when I was little I wanted to be on the stage with voice actors you know somebody in the pit speaking for me and then Deaf West had Spring Awakening and venturing forward just knowing what their style is and how they can work with hearing actors and hearing crew members and the artistic choices that we make and working all together. There's so much more than just you know the translation's if you will it's working together and I'm curious to see where this is going to go in 20 years. I'm curious to see all the different growth that we're going to have and even signing onstage we're still figuring out so that you can see us in the back of the House how we can sign and make sense and you know we want to make sure that we're not going over the head with concepts but we're preserving what the deaf mindset is and taking on the artistry in that.

[00:18:27] And you know it's it's just emerging so about what Ryan said as well. I'm thinking our main focus with the signed translations is you know it's still new and we hope that we can continue to preserve this and pass it on to future generations. Because a lot of things have already happened already. So we want to learn from that and continue to go forward Gallaudet University have some plays that we that are lost in some way. We want to make sure that we can go to a library and watch but we can't do that and have access. Some of these great productions that have been done so we're going to try to connect with some of the old productions if you will some of the old process of what they did and take this new work that we have and this is part of my journey as an artist trying to find where we can bring the old and the new together because we don't want any lost information.

[00:19:19] That's great. Thank you. I am wondering I'm going to go off script a little sorry.

[00:19:24] I'm wondering if we can talk a little bit about the performance that just happened and if Ryan and Josh can kind of dissect what work went into creating that just so that we all kind of get a better understanding of when you talk about work the work that you're doing I'm wondering if you

could give us a better picture of what that work looks like. Like how exactly. What are some of the mechanics of putting integrating so into musical theater like what had to be done to create that even just that performance of out there.

[00:20:10] Really I think the first thing we had to do is kind of set up every deaf person has their own method their own process.

[00:20:17] My way isn't necessarily what Ryan would do in approaching his work as well so this guy who just walked through the door how he's Segio he's a perfect example of this so I don't know if he would work for him as well. I missed everything you said how he just said yeah everything you just said.

[00:20:33] It was just awful and it was about you.

[00:20:35] So anyways my process my method as an actor is total involvement. So I did. I was in my friend's car and actually plugged in my phone and I played the music the Broadway cast version on the album and just Michael Ardan was the artist who sang that song with the original cast and the original Broadway recording and I was in my car and cranked it up and had the bass and I was just thinking of that feeling before a rehearsal. Also we wanted to make sure that we looked at where is this character in the story at this time what's the whole point of this song. Because every time we see this song we're getting more from him he's bringing his emotion to the story he's bringing his experience and quazi moto has this hero's journey that he goes through. So what am I feeling at this time and my artistic perspective is to make sure the hunchback you know he's very frustrated he's on the edge he wants to go out there but he's scared he wants to go out into the town. But he's always been isolated in the tower so all of these things I took where the character is at. You know what do I. What would I say when I'm scared what would I do when I respond to that when I want something as an actual deaths a user of the language. So they're going through all of these things.

[00:21:51] I would make sure that I would bring that into this song and help that would help with my translations and then we made sure that it matched the English words at the same time and so we had goals together with meaning and the music and then right in here this fantastic gentleman watched me and you know he'd give me some sign options and some choices he'd give me some advice and I really appreciated working with him because you know I've had worked with other soul masters who just say take my translation This is it and you have to use it. And so it didn't necessarily fit with my artistic perspective. So you know Brian gave me the freedom to make my own choices and to deliver this message.

[00:22:30] I think quazi MoDOT would and I don't think that this song means that I'm depressed and I think the song means that I'm happy I have to find this happy medium and so I had to make that choice and Ryan really. From I mean I've worked with him when we had the production of Tribes at the ACT Theater here in Seattle and so we've worked together before and so you know he told me what worked and what didn't work and gave me some great concepts to work with.

[00:22:54] And you know that's that's that's a really important part for us so excuse me. Yes. And before we even worked on this scene we had discussions and talked about the goals of the character of what quazi motto was going through and thinking through what would work with some of the options he had in this scene. So likewise before I worked with other so coaches before and we've had translations set up and then when they've given them to me they don't always work. I don't always feel them and then in real time it doesn't always match so. SL translation is part of that character's development to hearing actors can think of development through accents and taking on the different characterizations and tone and whatnot. But that doesn't work for us. So you know we take these translation and we just figure out how to make true meaning happen in this other language in three motion and processing and getting these things out. We come up with a translation. And so my job is the ESL master for this production. I have my version that I go ahead and work through. And he doesn't have to follow it. He can go through what he would like. Maybe there's a couple of things he would like to change or adapt. And we go ahead and work together. And ultimately though for his benefit he is the artists and he's allowed to create and keep whatever his preference is. I'm there to guide also as the master and to make sure that the audience has a clear visual. And there's several moments in that scene where it's critical that things are clear. The interesting part we were talking about the hunchback quazi MoDOT we were talking about kind of the question is the character actually learning as well in the cathedral.

[00:24:40] Frollo who is the priest who took him in. I guess you could say adopted how would he actually learn a SL If he was isolated and only spoken to and had to lip read because Frollo never taught him JSL he never would have the opportunity to learn the signs so that was an action issue that you know you're right. That's true he wouldn't be signing at all so just depending on his on speech reading at that time. So we actually had to take the liberty to really think about this is the fourth production of Hunchback of Notre Dame with deaf cast right. The third with Asyl involvement the fourth overall with this director that we're working with right now he's done previous Yonnet travelled in Germany as well. Yeah. OK don't critique that one but with the director Glenn who we're working with right now. You know the hunchback wouldn't sign. I mean at all. In the second that was the first production he didn't sign it on the second production that was more signing. But nonetheless in talking about it since seeing that production Disney did watch that first production that Glenn directed and it was just so dark and heavy and dreary and it was too dark it didn't take the family friendly vibe that we wanted and Glen did this again in his third production and elevated it. But still Disney didn't feel it was right. Still too dark. So in this production we're doing now with the signing and you know the light that it brings it's definitely giving more of this family vibe to it. And Victor Hugo who's the original writer of author of the story and how many of you guys have actually seen the Disney movie or any of the movies.

[00:26:16] Yeah this is nothing like the movie. It's nothing like the movie. It is so much just sadder. It is so much sadder and Glenn the director as well. His goal in this production is to bring it to Broadway and so that's where the initial discussions we had with some of the themes of the show's on what we wanted the audience to take away. So with the expectation of that plus the signing it gives us kind of license to take artistic liberty and you know go through what has happened learn from it and give it even more.

[00:26:46] Give it a new dimension especially with the music involvement. That's our that's our goal. And so we have a modern audience now and so we want to make sure that it caters to them and the Powerman of SL brings is wonderful.

[00:27:00] Thank you. I have a question for Patti.

[00:27:04] I'm curious what your reaction is to this moment in terms of of of deaf talent and art and and this mainstream attention that's happening on Broadway. Your

[00:27:20] Organization exists because historically ESL and deaf actors and Deaf community had to somewhat fight for recognition and fight for a place in society. And I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about just how you perceive this moment and of what's happening maybe even in Seattle and what you believe Deaf culture and culture bring to just art in a larger sense.

[00:27:59] Didn't even know about hash tag def talent. Many of our artists in the community are frustrated because you know they will get like hearing people to pretend to be deaf and we're not getting those roles we're not getting enough accurate representation. It's the same with like you know imagining people you know white people who painted black and having black face to do a black role that's not a cool thing to do. Right. So it's become a more of a hot topic in the last three years especially the deaf artistic community and they're kind of pushing back because we want our place on stage. We want her place on TV in the arts. Because it's really only our experience that we can bring and that's really valid. You can't imagine what our stories are because you haven't been through those if another deaf person you don't know what it feels like to be so frustrated and oppressed and discriminated against the struggles that we've grown up with. So our organization for the last seven years yay. You know I mean how it started we had a def film festival because we wanted to show more films get those out there by deaf writers deaf directors stories up there on the screen.

[00:29:05] And we hope they will be a very positive experience for the community. So that would inspire more artists to share their stories and get their stories up on the screen as well. So that when long we set up a theater festival we had an art museum tour. We had things that were more accessible for deaf artists and artists for the deaf community to benefit and understand and cherish the arts so that went along and how I got here it was because he really believed and supported deaf artists and their long journey because with deaf artists graduating and going off in their careers they often have to change careers because they can't make enough money to survive right. And we don't want that to happen we want those artists to stay in the field. So every few years we have a film festival and we will showcase those films international and national. We also have a theater festival that's coming up next year that we kind of alternate with the film festival and we're going to encourage new works by deaf writers.

[00:30:03] We're going to be hiring deaf directors hiring deaf actors stage team. I mean maybe have to be deaf but at least they can sign and we're going to work together on this because this is our opportunity to learn together to support each other to share resources share experiences and bring it

all together and to develop these new works and show these off. So not just in Seattle but also nationally to this spotlight is involved with a big project which is going to be starting next year it's called allround around how chowhound challenge which means other deaf artists like New York City see L.A. Chicago Austin we're all going to get together and we're going to think about how to create a pipeline to take artists from school to stage. It's a little frustrating because I mean where do you find opportunities where do you get to test your legs as a director or writer or an actor if you're deaf person. So we're going to try to come up with these answers and hopefully you know network a little bit work together have opportunities to show works in different cities and solve these solutions in different areas.

[00:31:12] Going off that. Can you talk a little bit. Josh and Ryan about what your experiences were like getting into theater. I did.

[00:31:20] Were there any obstacles that you had to overcome or what was your way in well I can speak about you know the history of the theater business.

[00:31:34] National Theater of the deaf. NTD was established about 50 years ago. How many. About 50 years ago.

[00:31:41] Set up by a man who worked on Broadway lighting designer and he worked with other well-known deaf actor was Bernard Bragg.

[00:31:55] And helped him to recruit some other deaf actors and they got involved in a production and took it on tour really successful and he got to the point where they were you know it was opening more opportunities opening more doors for deaf people in theater business. Before that there was only you know Gallaudet University to college at the time and a few deaf schools but with national theater of the deaf I really started to bring bring it into the mainstream and bring more attention. So I mean that was great and now we're kind of at the point in our current generation where there's more opportunities given to deaf artists. Is it really actors I mean really and basically it's just actors. There's not a lot of positions for directors or for the producers and so forth. Def West already set up def artistic director sure but they do have to hire sometimes some hiring people to help make their company successful. The same thing with Jeff Calhoun. I mean I mean bless his heart bless that guy's heart. Hearing guy brought in to help bring Def West to the next level and recognize you know some Broadway recognition as well. But this time I feel like at this point our lives where can we empower more deaf artists. You know at their own level like a creative team level and not just as actors but you know we want to empower more people in higher positions and expand the amount of opportunities that we're looking for. So deaf artists have been around for a long time but I feel like now with spotlight focusing on that part of the process I mean it's wonderful really starting this off.

[00:33:30] So we're gonna open that pipeline Yeah I think right now we're in a place where deaf talent is being given a little bit more opportunity. I mean I still feel like we can have a lot more but I feel there's a little bit more and I feel like that's great it's really good.

[00:33:50] I mean I'm gonna be a little honest here. I feel like a lot of times I notice not many deaf people have training in their craft. Not many deaf people have the resources to support themselves. I mean I feel like I'm very fortunate my story is that I was in high school. I mean I was like you know in advance theater program there and I was gonna graduate my high school with an AK in the theater and you know we're going to have this a. And I was getting ready to graduate. Unfortunately that program crashed before I finished my sophomore year and this one lady was walking along.

[00:34:29] She was like Hey I know you I've seen you before you're an actor and I said yes there are you definitely. Yes I am. Oh you should consider joining my program. So what's your program. And she said it's called a talented theater program. And so I thought well what is that. And she said Well you know this program is for students who have talent but the school system can't really stimulate them. So when the school sees the students have a lot of possibilities a lot of potential you know hey you guys can get a job you can do something you like in a trade or whatever we need someone to like get them into the business so this teacher wanted to take me to this class and we could work on the actual arts. You would get to know the business of doing that. And she said I'm interested in you. Please be my student. I said well sure. So we went along chatted with her.

[00:35:17] And you know she came my French class where I was and she was friends my French teacher that I was so sick at that time. And then one time she's like she like hey hey hey this is what she was doing. Want your teacher. No don't want interpret No I want you and me to talk. And she gestured that to me and I was like I'm sure I guess I mean wow.

[00:35:46] You just signed that I mean you know I joined a class for two years and those two years gave me so much when the class and she would like write 50 words now go boom do it sounds like ok right. And now read it and say well you finally get read glass when you as a kid you my work right now OK OK fine fine. And this thing we get something like 48 hours get to play in 14 hours right now right now. So we have to talk about in class theory everything go go go boom boom boom. Do they do it. And like we just feel like doing this to them like oh my god.

[00:36:14] And then I'm like you that and I'm like oh and they're like OK here's the curtain here's the lights and I'm like wait wait wait I just came from where I just came from really challenging program whereas the stuff that I was just doing oh no we're teaching you the fundamentals and I was like OK.

[00:36:33] I learned the fundamentals and I'm like wait a minute it didn't really have that same system in place for people like me as artists as actors. I mean I didn't need to know about the curtains or the lights and all that stuff and I no thank you. Thank you like forget that stuff. I needed to know more about the arts. How do I become an artist. How do I support you know my value in the hearing world. How do I tell my story. How how how do I do that. And I noticed that my high school my high school teacher gave me that. So this spring awakening I met many many many deaf actors who were like You're lucky you're so lucky. I'm very lucky why why my lucky. Oh Josh you're so lucky because you got that opportunity and I tried to work with deaf West for so many years and they have never given that opportunity to be in a musical and and I said Well where'd you go to school.

[00:37:22] I didn't.

[00:37:25] Ok so how do you know your work is really bringing the results it needs to because I feel good because because OK I get that.

[00:37:35] But did you get feedback from a director. Did you work on it. Well no. OK we'll see that's kind of weird that there's no feedback loop for these actors like you know I was telling this teacher give me feedback on. Hey Josh you're acting so good. Hey your facials. That's so good. I don't like your character a lot of feedback but these other actors don't get that and I'm like wow you know we have a credible shortage of schools to teach deaf people to do this. No formal training. Therefore how can we be the best how can be the best of the best. If we have no training how how do you do that how can we get this training if there's no teachers.

[00:38:05] So I mean that's kind of the deaf experience I mean people know deaf stuff and they understand you know like what the deaf experience is but you know so it's been very interesting myself learning how to mean I mean these guys have been wonderful and we've been talking about this so much and I think that you know it's time it's time for us to really start taking classes. I mean I took Groundlings the groundlings school like that.

[00:38:32] I'm sorry I'm going out for way too long I'm sorry.

[00:38:33] The Improv school the Groundlings Improv school in California great school wonderful actors you know Kristen Wigg from Bridesmaids is in that I mean people Melissa McCarthy was in that school. I mean great actors come from that school so I went there and I signed and all because of like

[00:38:54] And I tried to speak and I tried to hear how to hearing it and stuff and it got a little better but I'm like you know even that school itself is designed to develop and train for actors but not deaf actors you know when I couldn't just experiment as myself as a deaf person.

[00:39:07] So that's when I started to think you know I need to cite my own company. I mean not really I call it a company not really business. I mean I'm not competing with anybody. I'm just here to develop. It's called. It's called the deaf gang. It's not a gang like a street gang. It's like a group of people like a gang.

[00:39:22] And I mean the goal is that we have this idea with these theories we have these we're going to try to talk about things we don't work out things were play with things we see. And that's when you know I took this class right after class was done and then you know all of my 12 friends we were playing with and we were having discussions and thinking about how the hearing approach works let's change from these things to make an approach.

[00:39:41] How do we work with these things so I mean my point. I mean we're in a great position now. But I think that the deaf community is I mean like we really have these standards that are up there but we need help. We need resources to reach those standards.

[00:39:56] And I think that many of us have a talent we have the talent we have that experience inside but we need that polishing that you know it's like coal into a diamond. You know we've got the coal it's here you get a crack at it and polish it crush it make it beautiful where do we where do we make it a dime and where do we get that polished that we need you know.

[00:40:17] That's great.

[00:40:19] Yeah I think it's that thing that's happening now where everybody's talking about inclusive city.

[00:40:25] What does that mean. And for me person of color in America. So I do have like a certain way of approaching this idea but it's surprising to me how much of that is just making space and acknowledging that human experiences human experience. And regardless of who you are you have that experience to comment on and to bring forth. It's just it's our infrastructures our. The the. Even some of the traditions that we have in America that just need to start making that space for everybody to be able to participate.

[00:41:08] And it's it's really interesting how my just looking at a musical even is very representative of this struggle of knowing that. Well let me say this so this year we had the opportunity to work with deaf students in creating original musicals and so that was an incredible experience for me and one of the learnings for the kids was that something that we knew from the beginning. Anybody that's involved in musical theater is like OK. The thing that sets musicals apart from plays is that the people just start singing and that will be how they tell their stories and define who they are. But the point is that in a musical you know we're in danger of anybody being able to just start singing right just without any warning somebody anybody. It could be anybody just started singing. So watch out.

[00:42:05] And when we had these students walk in the room you could see some of our hearing students being like well they're not going to start singing but through the process of the kids discover that well actually that's not actually true either that there's music there that's that everybody is capable of. And I'm wondering if you said if you had that kind of experience or how do you how does a cell sing or how does it how there is an impulse behind music that I think is more than just sound and what hearing people perceive but I wonder if you've ever had thoughts on during this process of creating musical with SL of how that works. How do you what happens when you branch into singing.

[00:43:00] Yeah. If you meet any singing coach they'll tell you the best kind of scene is from emotion from that experience. So taking that emotion into the music you do we as deaf people we have our own rhythm inside of us our own emotion inside of us and we can't we have rhythm and you know music can be fast it can be slow and you just have to recognize where you're starting and that's my rhythm that's your rhythm OK give yours to me and work with each other and make sure you're in

time and that you know all of our heart beats to rhythm all of us can develop rhythm we breathe to rhythm and SL naturally has a rhythm as far as we can recognize what you would learn music through your ear growing up. We see it and it's completely you know our own way of doing it. So recognizing that both coming together at the table here we bring something different to the stage and we do it through SL and saying you know actors definitely you know we've grown up we listen and we can hear it and we can make music and make it work. But as far as deafness goes you know there can be no music playing but we could still feel it. We don't have to have sound we can feel it through our emotions and feel our own beat and make it happen.

[00:44:19] And yet again we can feel rhythm and it may not be actually feeling it from the piano that was happening earlier but you know we can ask the interpreters at fast it's slow is it high is a low all of that and then I can make my own translation and then get that out and express what I'm feeling through that song. So it's definitely a feeling and you know an interpreter can definitely explain how hearing people might approach that. And it's I have a funny story I was thinking of one time I was in Washington D.C. and I was at the short shoot festival and they have all these different schools and kids that come out come out Gallaudet has some folks that are on this stage and they have an acapella group. They just sing without any music. And it was raining during this song and some of their tech technical equipment stopped working but I was there watching some of the signers and they just kept going. Some of the deaf students just kept going and were like hey the music stopped actually but they kept going. They had the rhythm they had the skill they know how to keep beat. And they didn't have to have the music for the hearing people because we felt the music inside of us and that helped me remember the moment I was going to say actually in Big River I don't know if any of you saw a big river when I was here in Seattle.

[00:45:32] Yeah few of you. A few of you actually saw that. There is one story that director Jeff Calhoun he was actually working with and a deaf actor Tyrone Giordano who was playing the role of Huck in that production. We were at one rehearsal and Tyrone didn't have his hearing aids on so he actually didn't know the music was on or off. He had no idea. He just kept going and he thought the song was going and they were in rehearsal. And then Jeff actually said Hold hold for some technical reason and there was no visual cue or anything to help Hi go ahead and know when to stop and he just kept going. He kept signing his song and it was gorgeous and just you know stole the show there and Jeff's like hold well don't hold on watching this. And everybody was just captivated by what was happening on the stage. And you know he was the song I'm waiting for the light to shine.

[00:46:26] And there's part of the chorus where it repeats waiting for the light to shine. And Jeff was like Do you know what. There's going to be a silent moment where we stop the music and the audience needs to challenge themselves to not hear the music of which they've done the entire song and all of a sudden everybody just starts signing waiting for the light to shine waiting for light to shine without music. And you know it's like seven or eight times but you just stop the music entirely and you see the stage come alive a sign language waiting for the light to shine and the audience understood exactly at that moment what was happening. They understood music through the visual language of a cell you didn't have to hear it. And so Jeff had a kind of brief mistake in rehearsal realizing that it could be a genius point to put in the production later on which is something that we all take away and

that honestly became one of the most rhythmic things that was discussed about an articles about the point when the music stops and all the deaf individuals keep signing.

[00:47:23] What about you Patti. I think when we think about our language about alliteration where oh excuse me with literature and with folklore you know we do have rhythm and there's repetition and we actually have you know feeling that we can express through that and as we go through and put out these concepts in visual language that can still be shown because the whole point is to make sure that it's not necessarily just to make sure that what you're saying matches the sign language is that it becomes this visual picture as well. So and Ryan is saying one of my pet peeves is people critique Asil and they say you know it's like hands dancing and the hands are moving.

[00:48:12] It was like an choreography and when I read that you know it's good that they thought it was pretty. Yes that's nice. But don't forget that this is a language. This is our language. It's not just something that is sugarcoated and something that's visually pretty. This is our language we're talking about and it expresses who we are and so some of those people fail to recognize that and put it in print. That is a pet peeve of mine.

[00:48:41] We have some time for a couple questions from the audience if there are any.

[00:48:48] I have a question for you all as far as actors having a vision and hearing actors you know maybe just memorizing their lines and doing their spoken roles. Deaf people have to work even more sometimes to think about translations and to think about you know if it's almost like two or three times more the work. Do you agree. I was yeah yeah I do agree. The lyrics themselves are always there in the hearing people can just take the lyrics for what they are and follow what's written on the page. But as far as SL goes it's completely a separate language. So we as deaf artists have to discuss the lyrics in English. Think about the meaning. What's the hidden meaning what's embedded in their wires to plot. Where is this happening in the play with a musical and sometime lyrics are not clear because they're based on what was already said as well so now how do we approach this translation. We want to make sure that the deaf audience understands and gets the same meaning. We just don't follow the lyrics on the page because we want to give the deaf audience something that they can understand. And there's many deaf people who don't necessarily have you know maybe a strong understanding of what use of what music could actually be showcased as and so at the same time we have this transparency of our translation process that the deaf audience can leave knowing that they understood the story and were involved in the story musically not just following along with the English it's on the page because the whole point of a plays a take away from the story and that of course impacts are translations as well and you're right it's sometimes double triple the work and there's many times hearing actors fail to recognize that we need extra rehearsal time.

[00:50:35] We have to because you know hearing actors especially on Broadway you put up a show and two to three weeks but you know one or two you know weeks that's just translation work and talking about the meaning and going through that process so you know we're constantly educating the hearing theaters on that asking them to be more flexible in the schedule and to give us time so we can actually make our work count. And I think also both ways we could actually the more work that

we actually put in the better the quality of the product is going to be so I think it forces us to actually work even harder because English and bestseller's completely separate languages and we're working with concepts and if you know Ryons a great sign mastering so I can take his I have the luxury of having him give me feedback so readily and quickly and make translations.

[00:51:23] But good artists know that you own your work you actually have to make your choices go through. It has to make sense and it forces me actually to focus on my work and what I'm doing on the stage and some actors told me that they feel like you did a lot more work than for your character. And I was like I don't have a choice. I'm given this paper with print on it and like what do I do with that. They're talking about something they're talking about something I don't know some sort of bullshit going on. But anyways I just kind of get my way through all of it and I try to make sure that it creates the same meaning out there which does take more times and hearing actors kind of stay in that musical rehearsal that redundancy forever. That's not my process. I need more translation work with Ryan to go through and see how it syncs together with the English and why. As far as whether the deaf audience is going to get what would be better and what would be more visual and this constant collaborative work that we have Ryan agrees.

[00:52:18] Good question thank you. And really for a good example were and was actually involved with a Midsummer Night's Dream that is Shakespear Old English to modern day English to sell. Imagine what that process would like for all of those that were involved with the translation time. Imagine that work. It was time consuming how he was a code director he is sitting up there Hi Howie and he worked with Theresa here in the front. Teresa right here on a midsummer night's dream. They both Cogger acted that production and how he already wanted to make sure that we worked on translation's before we even got started with day one of rehearsal. It was a three four month process that started so we contacted the deaf actors. We were working one on one through Facetime Skype you name it. Making sure that all the transitions were ready to go so we could start the rehearsal process making sure that we were ready to put something together because we knew we couldn't approach it cold on day one and the benefit is that we had the time we knew what our timeline would be and we wanted to make sure the actors had their translations ready to go and they were consistent and concise to the point.

[00:53:18] So and to add something as well. Now all of the scripts that are in there are automatically in English and there's other deaf organizations out there where we're trying to provide more glossed scripts trying to make sure that we focus on sign first and take the translations that have been done and putting them into script form so the foundation is there and the story and the point of character development and everything going in the future helps others. So remember most of these does depend on English first and that is not us. We focus on sign first and that empowers us to tell our stories and to create our visual space of meaning and some deaf artists more like Ansell's storytellers.

[00:54:02] They don't have great English and they can become a little nervous about writing something down on a page in English. I mean their signing can be so beautiful the stories are amazing and we want to give them access to be able to make that work on stage. Whatever way they

want to make it work without having to be forced to know English first before I could even do anything else with that. So we really open it up and be as flexible as possible and so death spiral is really trying to focus on that and empowering the artists to take that route.

[00:54:31] It's time for a more question yes.

[00:54:37] The question was Has anybody written a play in American Sign Language verse or not. Not English translated into a cell but I think the answer is yes. I don't know. Oh wait wait wait wait. Yes yes yes yes yes yes.

[00:54:53] As one filmmaker His name is Jules Damron there is a movie that's on Netflix is it like.

[00:55:01] No no wait pan TV and YouTube and it's called Beyond essays beyond essays. So that was one where I know that she signed everything signs Einsteins signed gave it to actors and all the actors were like where's the script. Whereas English script was like No I'm signing it to you this is this is the script and the actors like wow not used to that and she's like No we're doing it. And she was like no no when I do I must have the issue of I must have a script she's like nope

[00:55:31] Too bad sorry. And so they were just really not used to it that it really shows right there I mean look at that. I mean it was so tough to even we're not even used to like giving our own language you know doing it our way first like we're usually doing. It's the English way first and our way of thinking. So I think that's one for sure.

[00:55:47] I'm sure there must be other people but unforeseen I'm not aware of them and I mean I don't know about anything that happened you know back in the day maybe something you know that I don't know about we kind of lost some of that connection with the older artists Ryan says. I knew there are some people working for the New York Defeater started doing some SL stories before writing them into English. They had already set up a workshop trying to develop a technique for doing that.

[00:56:11] Still it's in its infancy still working on that process. I do know that will be a success it will be empowering for deaf artists once we figure out and mature the process itself.

[00:56:25] Yeah let's put it out there to the live stream. This is what we want to see.

[00:56:30] I think all the examples that I've been talking about today and hunchback included have been English first and then you know incorporate integrating as well.

[00:56:39] But whoever wants to write a musical the other way around.

[00:56:43] You better start doing that because I think we want to see more of that. Let's get some musicals that are written so natively and so those translate that into song English. I think that would be really cool.

[00:56:57] Right. Yeah.

[00:56:59] Hey kids do that. But do you have a question are you reminding us about the time. Oh great. OK so yeah the question was did Ryan work with the librettist lyricist and questions kind of about what the role of NASL master is as well.

[00:57:16] Yeah we both we both did it and I wish we had a chance to work with the lyricists I wish but unfortunately no we did work together on this and also we did talk with the director Glenn Casal on some questions that we had related to like lyrics and choices making sure that we match Glenda's directorial vision and the meaning behind the words that we're using so most of the time it's just the two of us working on that together. To get an understanding and then work on translations after that.

[00:57:43] I've worked with a lyricist before on a show called Mr. Holland's Opus movie. And just last year became a musical. So I worked with that team and great experience.

[00:57:57] It had some lyrics for me like this doesn't quite match what we need to have a match and they change some things around the lyrics were great and I mean that we took our feedback and they change some things around and sometimes you know some things are set in stone you can't change them so it's too bad for you if you can't but you know I think that it's a smart idea to work with lyricist.

[00:58:12] Absolutely so maybe you did talk to the lyricist and the person who actually does that is different from the death poet. So I'm wondering as far as Clayton Valley and thinking about all these different death poets that are out there working some of their skill sets into what we're doing is that a place we could go in the future. Because I'm trying to figure out in my head how can you know with the lyrics how can that be the same in both language if we have deaf poets. But then also what can we do from there to take their skill set into the other field to create this equality.

[00:59:04] We did touch on that a little bit with vernacular vision Bernard Bragg is I mean a big pioneer. Do you want to. I mean huge huge huge guy. And now he's in his 80s and I mean you're gonna lose him now. I mean I mean we're losing him he's very ill and he's old and oh my gosh. But his work. I mean he did experiment with signing songs with a live band. I remember he told me about that and he said that he would sign these songs with the band and they would just kind of like you know Foley has signs a little bit like they would almost like he'd sign and they would like do it like a bar.

[00:59:37] Now the horns kick and if he did a certain sign or the drums would kick in to accentuate what he's doing that really express what he was doing and was either Wayne best No what was talking about the film with the signing and then there's the pictures on it.

[00:59:50] It was called Ransom's I know it you're talking about but I do remember the name of it. There's a story in a cell where he's signing the story and there's sound attached to it and there's music attached to it and one person will be signing first and then they would add like a sound and

video like afterwards like support the sign which is pretty cool experimental. I mean that's really the key we're still experimenting.

[01:00:09] I mean Ansell's only like 200 years old.

[01:00:11] So we still have like you know I mean 100 years of learning language in the perfect language and now we're in like the next hundred years to figure out how to play it with language. And I think like what you said like I mean lyricists would use like alliteration meaning like you know the first letter of every word or maybe they use rhyme or maybe they would use somebody else.

[01:00:28] Israel would have like similar concepts like or visual expressions of those like they would use for example like how they would put things in space in front of them or for example when you have these little Yeah there's different parameters. I mean you explain that are I don't remember all the parameters I'm sorry.

[01:00:50] First there's like there's like you know like an a there's an H.A. alphabet stories there's Paul Mourin Taishan which way that goes that matters. There's like mouth movement meaning like you know big or small depending what your lips are doing like your lips will express certain things. There is location meaning like is it on your face it on your shoulder or is it out in space. And then the other thing is the more movement movement yes movement like is it coming in is it going out is it side to side. So all these different I mean poems play with these parameters and the way that lyricists play with English different kinds of parameters in a different language but still playing with parameters and I think that's when things were oscillating like in Hamilton I'm a big fan of love I love Hamilton so much. And one thing I found very fascinating was that the lyricist Lin Manuel his multilingual his many languages and so his lyrics like he plays with concepts within those lyrics are like there's one song called satisfied but another one called that will be enough.

[01:01:51] So like it's the same sign right. It's the lyricist who's playing with these concepts. He has two different words and sometimes some sounds will be a different meaning. I think it was a I'm sorry I lost it but the point being he plays the sounds he plays with concepts and some word I mean some people focus on sounds and help poets can focus on hand shapes. Some play with concepts and one way we can play it with concepts another way and I think that the parameters and the parts of language that we choose to play with is what makes the art out of it.

[01:02:23] And one last comment here.

[01:02:26] You know not all deaf people learn as well from birth. Some learn it from a TRPer or some learned from family and friends some learn later in life.

[01:02:33] And if we as a community and I have not had the opportunity. But if you go in and learn sign language formally the structure of the grammar or the history then we would feel more confident with our language and the identity would be stronger earlier.

[01:02:48] You mean 12 years of and so would help me feel more confident with it. Oh my gosh I'm shocked. What a shock. Yeah exactly exactly.

[01:02:58] But yeah of course. I mean we don't all have the same access to education to schooling experience socialization.

[01:03:07] I do want to put my Bill of protest moment here my protest hat on and say that I do strongly believe in mainstream society which version and I do believe that we should all be and like emerging like to age in a class. You have a couple of decades 27 hearing kids with three deaf kids and the teacher who is deaf can sign.

[01:03:27] That means everybody in there every student will learn something which together we can all be in the structure based altogether. We can learn the structure of English together now when we're behind anybody else who could all be the same. I think that would level the playing field. I think that would help connect anything with their US and see the value in us as deaf people right now.

[01:03:43] They're like oh you know like me for example with politics today.

[01:03:47] I'm not going to name names but some people feel the need to you know talk about certain things but we don't see the value in these people that we kind of shove away from us. You know like Mexican lawyer move here and only speak Spanish. Maybe he's like a brilliant attorney in Mexico but it means something here because I don't speak English so what. Too bad you know he has value I think there's a value there we need to find value in each other. And so as emergent immersion.

[01:04:12] Yes that's that's that's great. Ryan Patty do you have any words that you want to leave us on less thoughts they don't have to be political.

[01:04:28] I feel like wow. I mean we shared so much but really again I mean kind of like what you are says. I just want to thank you all for coming here tonight and listening to our stories and you know FSL and music and def theater history and all that stuff and the language itself so hopefully you will leave with a better understanding of you know what we go through and what we hope to see happen in the future.

[01:04:55] I really encourage you to go to different events with different languages learn about their culture their people their issues their struggles. The more we understand about other communities the better we can advocate for all of us.

[01:05:10] Well thank you so much. Thank you Patti. Thank you. Ryan thank you thank you. Josh thank you. Thank you. To Seattle Public Library thank you also to spotlight thank you to our interpreters Jordan Brad and Eddie.

[01:05:25] Thank you so much. And thank you all for coming.

[01:05:30] This podcast was presented by The Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to The Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.