**Q: Welcome back to episode two of WHY THIS? A Nexus Arts podcast. My name’s Aaron Schuppan. I’m the media manager here at Nexus Arts, an intercultural arts organisation in Adelaide, South Australia. I’m actually recording this intro in the rather chilly confines of my living room today because, like many of you, I’ve gone into lockdown for seven days. With all of Nexus Arts’ live programming on hiatus for now, we’ve decided to release episode two early, and kind of perfect timing, because during lockdown we’re all going to watch a lot of movies, we’re going to watch a lot of TV and today’s guest works in the very industry that creates those things for us. Bec Taylor is a camera assistant and an emerging cinematographer in the film industry. So what perfect timing to celebrate her work and learn something from her. Also, if you haven’t already, I encourage you to have a listen to episode one, where I talk with Nelya Valamanesh. She’s a local emerging writer. She’s had a lot of interesting stuff to say as well. Until then, stay safe and I hope you enjoy my chat with Bec Taylor.**

 **Hello and welcome to episode two of WHY THIS? A Nexus Arts podcast. I’m Aaron Schuppan and I’m the media manager here at Nexus Arts. In WHY THIS? I have informal conversations with arts workers of all career levels and today’s guest is really great. Bec Taylor is a camera assistant and emerging cinematographer in the movie industry. We have a really great talk about the details of her job, her love of creating images that tell a story, what it’s like as a woman in a male-dominated sector and how sometimes a nice sunset makes the 16 hour days all worth it. So I hope you enjoy my chat with Bec Taylor.**

 **Bec Taylor, welcome to WHY THIS? the Nexus podcast. Thank you so much for joining us.**

P1: Thank you, Aaron Schuppan.

**Q: I’m talking to Bec currently via Facebook video messenger because she is in – I don’t even know if we’re allowed to know where you are.**

P1: No.

**Q: She’s away on a film shoot right now. Now she’s shaking her head at me. Top secret, but she’s not in the city. She’s somewhere with let’s say less than average internet quality. So forgive us if the conversation gets a little stilted from time to time. We’re dealing with that, but hello Bec. Say hello to all the listeners.**

P1: Oh no. It’s cut out. Oh no.

**Q: All right. Take two, as they say in the film industry, which is the area of the arts that Bec Taylor is employed in. That was a great segue from me. Ten points. Bec, hello. Tell us a little bit about yourself and what you’re doing right now.**

P1: So I’m Bec. I’m 23 and I work as a camera assistant. I’m currently working on a TV series called The Tourist, which is very exciting. I think they’re saying it’s SA’s biggest production to date, which is very exciting. So, on this, I am the South Australian Film Corporation’s camera attachment, which basically means I’m assisting the camera department, but aside from that, I camera assist on short films, and commercials, and documentaries, and little things like that, and then also shoot some things myself.

**Q: That’s super interesting. I’m going to ask you two questions. One, what’s a camera assistant? What do they do? I’ll get to the second question maybe after you give us a bit of an answer to that for the people at home.**

P1: So a camera assistant, so you have the director of photography. They’re shooting it. Sometimes, most of the time, they’re camera operating. You have the first assistant camera, who is the focus puller, who is making sure everything is in focus, and you have the second assistant camera who does the slates or the clapper board, and also assists the first AC and the DP, ensures the smooth running of the camera department, keeping on top of batteries and building cameras with the first AC and changing lenses, and generally doing everything involved in the camera and help move the camera department along and to get things shot and in the can, as they say.

**Q: So that sounds like a real team environment situation. How did you find yourself in this line of work?**

P1: Yeah. It definitely is such a team environment and I’m definitely where I am because of the support from my peers. The South Australian film industry is such a supportive place and everybody wants to see everybody do well, and I was really blessed to meet people early on, straight out of uni, on a short film who really wanted to help me succeed and they brought me onto different short films to be a second AC and to learn from them. Advice that I got early on was to treat every shoot as if it’s the biggest shoot ever. Don’t cut corners, even if it’s just a tiny little rinky dink thing. Always go through the process and try your best. Treat it as if you would as if it was a big movie. As much as you can. Yeah. So I’ve done a lot of short films now and each one of them, they’re all very different. Some have a little bit of budget, some don’t. They all have different cameras. You’re going to learn something from all of them. Learn things from more experienced people. Learn things about yourself by having to teach other people who are less experienced than you.

**Q: That’s a great answer. That’s really good advice. Try to treat everything you work on, treat it like it’s, up to that point, the most important one you’ve ever been on, or treat them all equally as important as each other. I think for a lot of people, film making can be a bit of a mystery. How do all these pieces come together? How did you – what am I trying to ask you here? I’ve got my interviewer voice on, don’t I?**

P1: You definitely do.

**Q: It’s more formal because you’re not here.**

P1: Yeah, and I can’t see you.

**Q: So the podcast is called WHY THIS? So I want to ask you, you obviously have an interest in the creative industries. Can you talk a bit about when you knew you wanted to move into this arena and why this section of it specifically?**

P1: I’ve always been interested in photography. My dad always had cameras, always used to be taking photos. I started taking photos on his film cameras, probably from when I was in early high school. So 12, 13 and I’ve always been interested in photography, and then through school, we do multimedia and you make little films, as you do, and I was like, oh this is so fun. Telling a story, doing all these different angles. Little me was very excited by filming things. I never wanted to be in front of the camera. I always wanted to be behind and be the one filming things, but I was never particularly good at writing or directing, and so I guess I was like, well, if I’m not writing and I’m not directing it, maybe I could just shoot the things. Back then, I didn’t really think about the possibilities of doing sound. I didn’t know what a grip or a gaffer was or anything back then. So, going through uni, I studied Media Arts at UniSA, which was a pretty good course. Lots of theory, but I learnt most about film when I came out of it and really being on short films, you can give everything a go. You can see how everybody works and I really liked camera and camera assisting. No matter what you’re doing, everyone has a role in the camera department, even though there’s a lot of you. Everyone has specific responsibilities and specific processes that you go through, and I really like the organisation of it, and I really like knowing all the camera tech. All the ins and outs of almost like the science behind it, behind exposure and lighting and stuff, and that just really drew me to that. I wanted to make pretty pictures, essentially, and I wanted to help them come to life.

**Q: That’s interesting what you say about the science aspect. There’s a lot of crossover between – film making, it’s a lot of different machines all working together and there is a lot of science involved in the creation of what equates to a pretty image at the end of the day. I’m curious about, again, the team aspect of film making. Full disclosure, Bec and I also do work on occasion together in camera department and it’s that aspect of film making that I love is the teamwork side of it. It’s different to other art forms in that way where a lot of the practice is quite solitary. Tell me about the teamwork side of it and do you have any advice for anybody listening who wants to get to film. Just about working within that team environment.**

P1: I think camera department particularly can be very hierarchical, which it definitely works and it definitely makes things very streamlined. You know who your boss is. They know who their boss is and you know the second AC is there to assist the first AC. The first AC is there to assist the DP and the DP is there to bring the director’s vision to life and so you’re always helping and making sure that your one above is taken care of and have everything they need to do their job, whether it’s building a camera that’s going to be the best configuration for them to be hand-held and doing that, and building the camera and changing the settings and doing that tech back side of it, and then the first AC is making sure visually that it’s in focus essentially, and then the DP is in control of the movement, but also they’re communicating with lighting department who are going to light it the way that they want, and the gripping department. They’re going to lay down track and they’re going to put the dolly on and they’re going to make sure it’s smooth movement. It’s all about assisting everybody to bring this whole thing to life. The second AC will set marks for actors, so actors can hit those marks, so the focus pullers can know they’re going to be at that point and that bit’s going to be in focus. It’s all about assisting people and one bit of advice that I got when I was first starting, a couple of pieces of advice, was one, never be caught with a slate in your hand. Two, don’t stand in doorways and three, never sit down unless your boss is sitting down also, and I think that sums up the way that the camera department is. It’s very old school and respectful, but that’s on the big scale things, but I really enjoy the smaller scale things where you can collaborate. You and I, Aaron, working together, I really enjoy when you’re shooting and you ask my opinion of things, or you’re like, hey Bec you can shoot this one, or hey, you want to focus pull this one, and I really enjoy working with you and collaborating with you because you are all about being a team player and giving everybody a shot and having it be a proper team member, which I really do enjoy. I think even if there is that hierarchy, but it doesn’t mean that people lower down on the ladder don’t have hopes and dreams and ideas of how things they like it to look. I think the collaboration is so great and when you get to collaborate and put aside the hierarchy, even though the hierarchy is there to help. I think it’s great when you get to collaborate.

**Q: It’s always great as the head of the department when you can collaborate and get everybody’s ideas, and then they work and then you tell everybody that they were your ideas to begin with. That’s why when I ask you for your thoughts, I’m just trying to steal your thoughts.**

P1: Yep, take all the damn credit.

**Q: You said something really interesting just now about hierarchy and things being old school and traditional. I don’t want to lean on this too much or lead the questioning, but it is an interesting thing to maybe discuss in terms of the traditions within the industry. Let’s face it. Like most industries, it’s always been really male-dominated and there are rigid ways of doing things. Have you encountered much of that and do you see things changing?**

P1: I think there definitely is still a gender divide but I think camera is almost one of the ones, especially in SA, where that gender gap is getting so much smaller. On this one, both the first ACs are male and the DP is male, but both the second ACs, Bonnie Paku and Ella Kroning, are female. I am also female and it’s a 50-50 split in the camera department, which is incredible, and I think SA and the SAFC really do have a push for getting more women in these underrepresented departments, but still, when we’re standing on set, even though there’s three of us in the camera department, there’s a lot of women in make-up, there’s a lot of women in costume. There’s no women in grips. There’s no women in electrics. There’s no women in unit or on set art department at least. I’m not sure about behind the scenes. There probably is, but it’s definitely very male-dominated. That’s not to devalue the men working in the industry, because obviously everybody’s there because they’re very qualified, and I feel very welcomed and I don’t feel alienated by being a woman. However, there are times where I’ll be carrying something super heavy and they’ll be, oh, do you want me to take that? Is that all right? I am a very small person. I’m quite skinny but I’m very strong, but I always get, oh, do you want me to carry that for you? Do you want a hand with that? If I need help, I will ask for it. There’s a lot of – all women get asked, is that too heavy for you? Are you okay with that? That’s I feel the main divide.

**Q: That’s interesting. I’ve definitely been guilty of that myself. There’s a knee jerk instinct to be, I guess, chivalrous for lack of a better word, and ask, but, yeah, I’ve heard that multiple times before. If I need help, I’ll ask, like anybody else.**

P1: Yep, exactly, and there’s young boys around in grips and in electrics and they won’t get asked if they need help, because they’re boys and they just do it anyway, even if they’re not super strong. They just get on with it because they’re men and they need to learn how to be strong.

**Q: That’s the thing. There is a reverse to that, yeah, where you might see some skinny young guy struggling with something. I’ll be like, oh, he just needs to toughen up.**

P1: Exactly.

**Q: It’s a terrible double standard for both parties.**

P1: [00:16:39] help. She’s a damsel in distress. But I definitely haven’t particularly experienced anything necessarily. It’s all people wanting to help. There’s a few times where it will be like, oh, the camera girls do this and I guess we are girls. I guess it’s okay but I don’t know. It’s more stepping on my personal views of feminism and how I don’t like being called ma’am and miss.

**Q: We even try not to call anybody guys anymore. Hey guys, can you this, that or the other.**

P1: Because it feels like a gender neutral term and I use it a gender neutral term as well. I can say it’s a whole group of girls. Say hey guys, but, yeah, I think it is a push for more gender neutral greetings is great. Hey folks is a good one.

**Q: Folks is good. Folks is a good one, right.**

P1: I like folks.

**Q: Maybe leading on from that, and going back to the title of the show WHY THIS? I think someone I would like our listeners to think about is just how much work the arts industry involves on all ends. We all get into this because we enjoy it and we’re pursuing a passion. Whatever medium that is that we get into, but it’s still work. Really hard work a lot of the time. I can speak from personal experience, film making is an exhausting day on the job and you often really doubt – well, I do. I find myself questioning, why do I do this for a living? I’m sitting in a hole that I just had to dig to get a camera angle. It’s 40 degrees and I’ve got flies in my mouth. What exactly am I doing with my life? I guess my question is real simple. What are the times that make this hard? Are there times where you question this as a living?**

P1: It definitely is hard. It’s definitely rough. We just did a six day week in the outback. It was between 30 and 35 for the first four days of the week. Coming home after 12 hour days covered in dust and dirt and my skin is wrecked from the wind and so dry, and my body is so sore all over, but I was driving home on Saturday evening and the sun was setting. It was in the country and Paul Kelly was playing on the radio and it was just, I am so lucky and so grateful to be out here in the Australian outback, making this vision come to life and being able to be in these beautiful locations and being paid to be out here. Absolutely it gets tough, but it’s the opportunities that we get and the places we get to go, and the people we get to meet, and the stories that we get to tell, that really makes it so worth it. So, so worth it and it’s worth the 3 am wake up for a 5 am call, and it’s worth the all-nighters and the rolled ankles running through Mount Crawford because you need to get them that battery right now. It’s worth all the hard parts because there’s so many times – particularly this week. It’s been quite tough but I’m standing there and I’m beaming and people go, “What are you smiling about?” “Oh, I’m just happy to be here,” and they’re like, “Oh, that will be beaten out of you real soon. You’ll become jaded, don’t worry,” but I love it. I’m just so happy and that sounds so corny, but I’m just so happy and I love it, and I couldn’t imagine doing anything else.

**Q: I can completely relate to that and that’s not corny at all. You put a big grin on my face and I can’t wait for the next end of a 16 hour day where I’m exhausted, and just something sparks in me and I see some wind through the leaves or a sunrise, and I get a big smile on my face. Look, I think you answered my next question, which was what keeps you going?**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Is it just those little moments or is there more to it than that?**

P1: I think it definitely it’s the little moments. It’s being on set and being like, oh, wow, that looks great. We just hustled for an hour to get this built, get this camera done, do all this stuff and looking through this monitor, it just looks beautiful. That’s incredible, but it’s also seeing these final products. Camera crew come on, we shoot it, we do that bit, but we’re not involved necessarily in the pre-production or the post-production. The thought of the writers, the directors, this is their pride and joy. We’ve all made things that we’re so proud of but to imagine how they would feel to be seeing this come to life, that’s great. I’m all for just helping people and helping them realise their dreams. It’s probably not their dreams anymore because these are the big shots. They probably do this all the time, but it’s still helping people. It’s still making their dreams come true and one day, I hope that will be me and I hope that the people that I get to work with will feel the same way, and it’s more than – the crew can often feel it’s just a paycheque for us, but really, I think I need to keep in mind that it’s a paycheque for us but it’s someone else’s heart and soul that they’ve put on this page. It’s actors that are distraught on screen. They’re putting themselves out there. They’re telling stories that are going to be important to people, that are going to watch it. It’s not just we come to work, we point the camera and then that’s it. You’ve got to think of the bigger picture. Otherwise it is like, why are we doing this hard work? You’ve got to think of the end game, I guess.

**Q: Yeah. That’s beautiful. It is people’s hopes and dreams. Saying all that, you’ve reminded me that at least once on every shoot that I’m on, I have this moment of clarity where I look around and I just think, there’s 20 adults here, pointing cameras at a bunch of other adults who are dressed in costume and playing make believe, so that we can show a bunch of other adults something and give them an emotional experience. It all boils down to that. It’s very strange and it feels very cheesy in that moment, and so kind of absurd. That will always reignite me if I’m feeling tired or just not feeling it that day. Just the oddness that this is just humans trying to tell each other a story.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: In a very complicated and expensive way.**

P1: Yeah. A very roundabout way. You could have just written it down, but no, no, let’s make a whole film about it. More people will see it that way.

**Q: We’ll go to the desert and pretend. I won’t keep you for too much longer, but I wanted to ask, just in relation to that, you talked about, you said, I hope one day when I’m in that position that everybody will remember that this is my dream, or they’ll get behind you in that same kind of way. What are your hopes and dreams? Do you want to be a first AC forever or do you have grander designs for yourself?**

P1: I would love to shoot my own things. I would love to eventually one day, in the distant future, be a director of photography and I’d love to shoot a feature film or a series that tells a story that I’m very passionate about. I have a lot of passions about politics and equal rights and just raising awareness for things and social activism, and I would love to one day be able to create something and work on something that I feel is a really important story to tell, and be able to bring that to life and be able to have a great team around me and make things happen and play make believe, like you said. It’s just so much fun.

**Q: [00:26:10] and even if there wasn’t the nobility of wanting to tell stories that you think are important or have an impact on people. Honestly, at the end of the day, just saying it’s fun, that’s a good enough answer for me. Why this? Because it’s fun. So the last thing I want to ask you, and my hope with this little mini series of interviews is that there might be people in the audience who are considering – well, talking to writers, painters, musicians, filmmakers like yourself – I hope that there might be people listening who are contemplating picking up the pen for the first time, or I’ve always wanted to pick up a camera but just don’t know where to start. So I guess my question is twofold. I’ll wrap two questions up into one. What would you say to someone, or perhaps a bit of advice on where to start? How do we go about things to begin with, and is there anything that you would specifically tell younger Bec if you could go back in time and give yourself a piece of advice?**

P1: Piece of advice. Piece of advice. I think the most important thing in this industry is – but I guess in all arts industries – is to not take rejection personally. I think that’s a good piece of advice. I think sometimes you can be super qualified for the job but you just don’t get along with whoever it is. Well, I guess that is personal.

**Q: Maybe they don’t like you.**

P1: I take that one back. I need to think about another one. I think the nature of the arts industry is that there is going to be a lot of rejection but to not take that personally, because there’s so many people who are just as qualified and just as lovely and nice. There’s so many people out there who have the same passions as you do, and it can feel like you’re just constantly competing and trying to get to the same goals, but I think we all have to support each other and so I think no matter how perhaps – even if you get a bit bitter that you didn’t get that job that you were sure you’d get because you’d worked with them before, it’s important to remember that your time is coming and to just keep pushing and to keep trying. A bit of advice that I got was to, when things are getting a bit tough, or perhaps you’re working and some people are being arseholes to you, you just go, you know what? That’s awesome. Cool. Great. Love that for you. Moving on. Don’t care. Just go, that’s awesome. Great, and you get rejection. You don’t get the jobs. You know what? Cool. That’s awesome. No worries. There’ll be another one coming and I’ll keep trying and you keep networking. Go to all your local events. Look up your local film corporation, if you’re not in SA, or SAFC, South Australian Film Corporation, is a great resource. You research. You find out things. You network. You talk to people. You tell everybody under the sun what you want to do with your life, because you never know who knows the right person. You get these jobs by knowing people you don’t. You can be underqualified but you know the person, and you’ll get it, and so it’s so hard, but you just got to make friends with everybody, is my advice. My advice is make friends with everybody.

**Q: That’s excellent advice. I would like to go back and tell 18-year-old Aaron exactly that, because the taking rejection thing in particular, I think that’s the hardest thing for anyone in the creative world, because you’re going to get a lot of it and it’s really hard to not take it personally. You’re absolutely right, but I like the aggressive positivity that you just encouraged us all to have. Oh I didn’t get that thing? Great. Good. Okay. Carrying on. Well, it’s a learning opportunity. I try now to take rejection as a learning opportunity. Maybe why didn’t that work, or why didn’t blah, blah, blah. To find the positive in everything.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Keeps you going, I suppose.**

P1: Exactly. Aggressive positivity. I like that. That is definitely my way I look at life.

**Q: Well, I think it’s working for you and you’re doing great things, and South Australian film industry is a better place because of people like you, I think.**

P1: And you, Aaron.

**Q: On that note, I’d like to thank you again on behalf of Nexus Arts and all our listeners for taking time out of your one day off this week to talk to us and give us a bit of an insight into a very interesting part of the arts industry. So thank you, Bec Taylor.**

P1: Thank you for having me, Aaron.

**Q: And there we have episode two of WHY THIS? I hope you enjoyed my chat with Bec Taylor. To stay up-to-date with everything happening at Nexus, visit nexusarts.org.au. It’s thanks to Arts South Australia recovery fund that all of our gallery exhibitions will be going online this year. Visit nexusartsgallery.com to check it out. We’d like to thank our partners and sponsors, Spark Brewery and Rose Kentish Wines. Check out these socially responsible labels wherever you buy a drink, and finally special thanks to We Made a Thing Productions for sponsoring us with the use of their wonderful podcast equipment. Visit wemadeathingstudios.com to check out locally-made web series and films. See you next time.**

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