**Q: Hello, and welcome to Episode 5 of WHY THIS?, a Nexus Arts Podcast. I'm Aaron Schuppan. I'm the media manager here at Nexus Arts and Intercultural Arts organisation in Adelaide, South Australia. In WHY THIS? I talk to artists from all sorts of backgrounds at varying levels of their careers, about why they do it, why they started, what keeps them going, and what they hope for the future. In my role here at Nexus, I get to speak with artists from all backgrounds of all disciplines. And I wanted to extend those conversations and share them with you, the audience. Today I sat down in the Artist Studios out at Carclew House in North Adelaide and spoke with Jamila Main, a theatre maker, consultant, writer, actor. You name it, they seem to do it. I had a great conversation with Jamila about making theatre, their writing process, and the importance of inclusivity and representation, which is a thing that many of the guests on the podcast bring up. We also have a short yet passionate rant about the James Bond films. So without further ado, I hope you enjoy my conversation with Jamila Main. Welcome. We are in the Artist Studio at the back of Carclew House right now with Jamila Main. Would you like to introduce yourself to the people at home and tell us what you do?**

P1: Yeah. Hello. I'm Jamila Main. My pronouns are they/them. I identify as non-binary and I'm queer. I'm an ambulatory wheelchair user, but most importantly, I am an artist. I mostly work as an actor and a playwright, but I also work as a disability and access inclusion consultant and dramaturg and just, like, freelance and picking up odd bits and gigs in between and making art as much as I can.

**Q: Beautiful. Whatever pays the right in between, right?**

P1: Definitely.

**Q: Yeah. That's a lot of things.**

P1: Yeah, my calendar is very full.

**Q: Well, that's awesome. It's good to do many things, but also, yeah, be looked for them all. Let's sort of rewind a bit. So you do a lot of things now. So maybe rewind to – we're all a child who's in the world, and at some point we figure out a certain path of interest and stuff. Can we go back there to, I mean, what came first?**

P1: I was always telling stories as a child. All my games were involving characters and dolls and toys and drama. And whether that was acting it out myself and playing it, or making a book out of folded A4 sheets of paper, drawing the story across the book and then dictating to my mum, because I couldn't write yet, what words she had to put on the page. And being very specific if – she would try to paraphrase to get it done quicker. I was like, no, I'm actually picking these words because this word is important. So it's just something I've always done. And then in high school was the drama nerd. Always writing shows and putting them on at lunchtime and asking people to come. But left high school not knowing that acting schools were a thing.

**Q: Sure.**

P1: And I realised very late in high school that there were actors in Adelaide. I thought that was something that happened in London and New York and Sydney.

**Q: Right. Yeah, yeah.**

P1: We didn't go to the theatre as a family and I grew up in Hallett Cove, so there wasn't a lot of local art that I was exposed to. I just did not know it was an option for me, but knew I loved to do this. And I went to Flinders Uni to appease the parents and do a real degree.

**Q: Sure.**

P1: But I made sure I got into the high achieving arts degree, which was 14 of us were selected, and we had to maintain very high grades. So even though I was studying drama theory and I did a practical acting class as well, and then had a double major with international relations.

**Q: That sounds legit. That's going to keep mum and dad happy.**

P1: Yeah, which is full of - - -

**Q: That's good on paper.**

P1: - - - business nerds who didn't want to speak in front of people, but I'm happy to get up and pretend I'm the president of so-and-so and give a report about liaising with China.

**Q: Cool. So you found an acting school. I guess you must have found your people there.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: I'm particularly interested in, like, you have self – what do you call it? Self-made theatre. Acting, I feel so sorry for actors. It can be such a – you're just waiting on other people to say yes or no to you, essentially, right?**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: So a lot of actors turn the pen to the page and write something, but it sounds like writing was something there all along. Tell us about Butterfly Kicks.**

P1: Yeah. I was always an artist who – I'm not satisfied doing one role. And I have stories to tell and it's a total burning need. And Butterfly Kicks was that real big burning need. I started writing it when I was at acting school, AC Arts. So after I left Flinders, I was like, I had the skills and the guts to stand up to my parents and say, I'm going to pursue this.

**Q: I'm done with this foolish international whatever.**

P1: I will never liaise with China. Yeah, I was taken over by this image of a teenager at a New Year's Eve party. Incredibly awkward, incapacitated by their awkwardness and falling totally madly in love with another girl across the dance floor and not knowing that they were queer previously.

**Q: Yeah. I haven't seen the play, but there – the first 10 pages are available. We'll put a link in the podcast thing. I read it last night and, yeah, it's the perfect description of that, especially teenage.**

P1: Oh, yeah.

**Q: I felt like I could see it. I could feel the tingle in the skin and that complete intoxication with a person on site. How autobiographical is that, or?**

P1: I approached it as if I had known I was queer as a teenager, which I didn't. That was something I pushed down and didn't address. If I had known I was queer in high school, what might it have looked like?

**Q: Sure, sure.**

P1: What would've been the really beautiful, exciting things, but what would also have been the really hard things? And I actually ended up coming out to my parents when they came and saw Butterfly Kicks.

**Q: Wow.**

P1: And a big part of Butterfly Kicks is Mila, the self-discovering queer character is terrified of telling her mum, terrified of being publicly queer and the consequences of that. And I really wanted to put on stage a really clear example of beautiful, intoxicating, wholesome queer love, and all they want to do is hold hands and dance at formal together, and be on the swim team without getting bullied. And do all these things that heterosexual people get to do.

**Q: It's taken for granted, right?**

P1: So there are really strong moments in the play of the first time they hold hands in public and giving that the actual weight and terror of it. So it's not autobiographical. Her name is Mila which is similar to mine. But it is more of a imagined sort of alternate universe - - -

**Q: Yeah, sure.**

P1: - - - and a very much more heightened version. I think I was a very awkward teenager, but nowhere near as much as she is.

**Q: Sure. Wow, that's such a – I mean, the coming out to your parents on stage, that's amazing. That's incredible. I'm just – I didn't know that. I'm really super impressed by that. Part of what I like to do in this podcast is talk to people who work in fields that I don't. And maybe educate any of the listeners out there about the processes behind. So let's talk about theatre. I work in film and I feel like they go hand in hand. Get a bunch of people who you put in costumes, you tell a story and other people watch it. But, obviously, very different things. But also, in practice, I don't show anybody a movie until it's done. Let's rewind and talk to me about the process of making a piece of theatre. I've been to readings of your work, where it's in development and - - -**

P1: Oh, cool. I didn't know you'd seen my stuff.

**Q: Yeah, you and Aud at - - -**

P1: Oh, How to Eat Rabbit? Oh, my gosh.

**Q: Yeah, actually my – I came with my partner.**

P1: Oh, beautiful.

**Q: Yeah. And I loved it and I just loved watching people on stage just reading work. It was so – a mess about as raw as you can get in terms of performing, at least, but knowing that it was still in developed. I sat there with a perfectionist filmmaker's anxiety. Like, oh, my God, it's not finished yet, why are you showing people? Can you just talk us through the process of that? It's really interesting.**

P1: Yeah. I take a very long time when I make my work, which I think is good. And that usually means – currently I'm touring shows that I've written, but I'm also meditating and thinking and pondering a lot and researching plays that I'm yet to write, that I know I'll probably write next year or the year after. And I'm also writing currently and I'm writing film scripts for the first time this year rather than plays, which is cool. So, for How To Eat Rabbit, I wrote that one quite quickly. I'm breaking my own usual process there. Where the election happened in 2019, the federal – Australian Federal election, and the Libs got in. And, at that time in the world, I'm very responsive to what's going on in my life and what's going on in the broader world. And, at that time, Greta Thunberg and School Strike for Climate was at its peak where it was - - -

**Q: Yeah, that's right.**

P1: - - - so present and there were rallies happening in Australia and people were marching in Adelaide. And it just felt that the future of our country was resting on that election of whether we would work towards a safer planet and take action on climate change, or the Libs getting in signalled to me that we're not going to make those changes. And as a disabled person, I'm going to die in the climate catastrophe much faster than a non-disabled person. I need medication. And if I can't access that medication, I'm going to be in debilitating pain where I can't function, I can't speak, I can't walk, let alone outrun a tsunami or however bad it gets. I need a wheelchair sometimes. And if that gets a puncture or if – there are power chairs that need to be charged to operate, I'm very reliant on other people to live. And there are lots of cases where bushfires happen and there isn't an evacuation plan for disabled people. And the shelters aren't accessible to everyone. So the safe place is not the safe place for all of us. And I just felt like I had to push aside everything else I was working on at that time and write a play about this, because I was so angry and I was genuinely scared for my own life and for the lives of people who have more severe disabilities than I do, people who rely on oxygen tanks. And I was just full of all this rage and our – we are human beings. We deserve life. And so I wrote How To Eat Rabbit in two weeks.

**Q: Wow.**

P1: That was all I did. And then I submitted that to the State Theatre Company of South Australia's Young Playwrights Award, and they gave it a merit award and said it was very good and good ideas. And then I got The Mill residency, so I had two weeks in the space. So I - - -

**Q: Maybe just for people that don't know, what is The Mill? It's a really crucial part of Adelaide's arts scene.**

P1: It is. I'm so glad it exists. And I remember when it first appeared and was like, oh, thank goodness. It's a creative hub. So there are studios for artists with all different practices, shoemakers, visual artists, tattooists. There's so much in there. And there's also an exhibition space, but there's also a theatre which they let out to people and have shows on during the Fringe. But they have these residency programs. So I got free use of the space for two weeks. And we were just easing our way out of lockdown in Australia at that time. So that was a whole year later from submitting it to the award and having written the first draft that I came back to the script for the next time.

**Q: It's getting boring to talk about lockdown and COVID, but hey, we're living with it. That's really interesting that this was inspired by something at a certain time. Then we went into a bit of a test run of that's – how much did you know old mate COVID inform the work?**

P1: It was odd.

**Q: Oh, by the way, for the listeners, I know what the play is. Tell us – can you – a synopsis of - - -**

P1: Two people, one Gen Z, one a millennial, retreat underground into a DIY bunker of sorts and are training to prepare for the climate catastrophe, training to build all their skills to survive it. And one is becoming increasingly unwell and debilitated by some kind of illness or disability that we're not quite sure what is happening with this person. Could they be pregnant? Could they be ill? We're not sure what's happening and that character doesn't know what's happening. And it becomes this really big pressure cooker of survival for these two. And so I came back to the play over a year later to do the residency where I worked with Audrey Mason-Hyde as an actor, myself as an actor, and as playwright, and Teddy Dunn as dramaturg. And Teddy was Zoomed into every rehearsal and development from Melbourne.

**Q: That was part of the residency - - -**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: - - - of being – having that – the mentorship, I suppose, the access to it.**

P1: That was – I brought Teddy on and pitched the project that way. And I got a few grants to pay artist fees and opened this play up and was like, oh, these characters are putting on masks when they leave the bunker. Oh, these characters are using hand sanitiser when they come back. And, oh, there's bushfires. I've written that there's bushfires nearby and we had just had the horrific bushfires in Australia. And I felt like I'd written this prediction and these two people in isolation in this bunker away from the rest of the world. And it's described that everyone's at home and not really going out and healthcare's really hard to access. And then not wanting people to think that this is a play inspired by lockdown. It's like, no. Disabled people get isolated in our homes all the time, and I felt very prepared. When lockdown happened, I was like, cool. I make work in my living room a lot. I'll just keep doing that. And now I get to watch all this amazing theatre that's being live streamed and performed online that I usually don't get to go to if I have a bad flare.

**Q: Sure.**

P1: So we worked as a team on How to Eat Rabbit. A dramaturg is like – I call them a script doctor.

**Q: Yeah, I was going to ask. I think it's - - -**

P1: A guide.

**Q: Sure.**

P1: They look at the play as a whole and they're aware of its context. Is it referencing a specific era? Are there specific songs or texts that the play references that they need to know about? And, like, why are the curtains blue? Those kind of questions.

**Q: That's really cool. It's not – there's got to be some sort of equivalent in film. I mean, I'm deep in rewrites of a script at the moment with a co-writer, but we often get lost in the woods. And just the idea of having someone there that's just seeing the bigger picture, I guess, perhaps allows you to run free within the guiding fence line that they're providing. And you can sort of, yeah, put the logic aside and go play and they'll be like, eh, maybe over here. That's really interesting.**

P1: Because I really like in my work – I'm not writing a play to be read on a page in a room. Like, cool, great. Read my plays. But they’re for – to live on the stage, to be up, to be spoken, to be moved. So I like to work with actors while it's still pretty fresh.

**Q: I guess when you're writing, how much are you thinking about the reading experience versus this is a blueprint for something to be performed? And what's that process like?**

P1: I'm very much thinking of it as the blueprint that actors and a director will use to put on stage. That's what a play is. I'm also going to make it look pretty on the page and I write very funny or beautiful stage directions that the audience and the theatre won't know, but someone reading it will know.

**Q: Absolutely. Yeah.**

P1: And that will also inform what that stage direction actually is. So rather than just “They exit”, like, what can I give you? Is there a verb or an adjective.

**Q: They leap off stage, or vamoose. Yeah, it adds colour that really will inform performance and tone.**

P1: Yeah, like for Butterfly Kicks when they had the handheld moment, I wrote, they hold hands but then I added, “Nothing bad happens”.

**Q: Oh, that's really great. I felt that.**

P1: Oh, it just gives me tingles every time. Because I was also performing Mila in Butterfly Kicks. It gave me and Lisa, who played Annabelle, so much context of what this moment is and the tension that's behind it. So we worked – we would read the script How To Eat Rabbit at The Mill and we'd have huge conversations about it and what the actual story is, and I would go away and do rewrites and drafts. And I wrote a new scene or two based out of conversations with the actor and the dramaturg. And it was a very collaborative process. And at the end we had a showing where we read the script, so then I could gauge audience feedback. Do you laugh at the right moments? Is there anything that you're confused about and you don't understand that I need to make clearer? That's such a useful part of the process, and now I'm still making tweaks to it. I've done another draft since then and I'm hoping to get it on stage next year or the year after. I'm pitching it to a few theatres next week.

**Q: Nice.**

P1: So fingers crossed that you'll have a show to come see.

**Q: That'd be great. Yeah.**

P1: And during rehearsal I'll still be doing edits and tweaks.

**Q: Sure.**

P1: Probably won't have to write a whole new scene or do a major cut. But hearing actors say lines, you realise, oh, that doesn't actually sound right, or I can trust they'll do it in their performance. They don't need to say, I'm really angry with you. The way they say, “Can you get the lettuce out of the fridge?” will tell me that they're angry.

**Q: I mean, I write as well and I know those things. I know that I don't need my character to [00:21:24], “I am mad at you for the thing that you did.” It's the way they open the door, it tells you that. But that process is still – I mean, for me still – it takes me 12 drafts to get to that simplicity. Oh, the way she lights a cigarette, I can cut that whole monologue. It doesn't need all that. That's really cool that you get to run it over and over in front of audiences and yeah, where are they laughing? Where are they crying or how does that moment feel?**

P1: Yeah. And I don't think – when I started, I didn't realise how long things take. I wrote Butterfly Kicks, started 2017, finished at 2018, did a development of it 2019. It was programmed to be on stage at Rumpus in 2020 – COVID. And then we got it on stage May 2021.

**Q: This brings me to something I like to ask everybody. I mean, look, artists, we get impatient. We want to do the thing, show the thing. But, yeah, it takes time, takes patience and that can be a struggle.**

P1: Why do you make up when it's so hard and it's poorly paid and it's stressful and the government hates you?

**Q: There you go. Yeah, exactly what I was going to ask.**

P1: I think it's the audiences for me. I make work for audiences to see and often very specific audiences. Everyone's welcome, but Butterfly Kicks was very much for young queer people.

**Q: Sure.**

P1: How To Eat Rabbit was for these young climate strikers to say, I hear you, I see you, but also from my disabled community and go, our stories are never told. And they are always, if they are told, told by non-disabled people who have no idea what they're doing and often do very hurtful portrayals and go, here's a story for us. And it just brings me so much joy to share work with audiences and hear their feedback and how they experience the show. And to have an impact on people, to – someone saw a show I made about getting diagnosed with endometriosis and all the medical trauma I had to go through to get that diagnosis. And she was like, I'm going to go home and write a play about my experience.

**Q: Awesome.**

P1: I'm like, cool. Amazing. Or people bringing their parents to see Butterfly Kicks and telling me that their mum now understands them a bit more. Yeah, I did a play with Sydney Theatre Company, just – it was just drop that one in there about autistic people and disabled people. And I had my phone blowing up with autistic friends who have never seen themselves on stage and never seen an autistic actor playing an autistic person and a disabled person playing a disabled character, and what that just means to people. I don't - - -

**Q: And I imagine not in a way that's, like you said, a negative representation or a condescending representation. Or whatever infinite amount of just wrongheaded ways [00:24:51].**

P1: Yeah. Nuanced and beautiful and complex, and interesting. Because Butterfly Kicks was one of the best experiences of my life. I was so happy every day, but I was also incredibly stressed because I was working as the playwright, the actor, the producer, which was a huge responsibility. The access coordinator, determined to deliver a huge amount of access. And marketing. And it was so stressful. I was working 14-hour days and I'm disabled. Sometimes I can't work a six-hour day. So it was exhausting and I was so stressed and I was like, is this even worth it? I'm so tired and I'm not going to get – I'm going to get paid, but not as much as this work is actually worth.

**Q: Every now and then when I'm working on things like that, I'll sit down and I'll calculate my hourly rate.**

P1: But then once we opened and I had the audience and I got to just be an actor on a stage telling a story, that's the best thing. If I could act every day, if I could write every day, which this year, I have had that privilege to do. I think I've done something like eight or nine shows this year. That's just the best feeling in the world. It makes me so happy and it made it all worth it. I live with chronic pain. I'm in really high levels of pain every second of every day. And I'm either coping, and that's when you see me out in public, or I'm not coping, and that's when you don't see me and I'm at home screaming into a pillow and having an awful time. But when I perform screen and stage, my pain goes away, and no doctor can give me that. They try. They cannot. I'm on very high levels of pain meds and it's like I could take a tic tac and I'd have the same difference.

**Q: Oh, no.**

P1: So when COVID happened and I lost nine months of work overnight, my first thought was, oh, fuck. I'm going to be in really high levels of pain for however long and I don't have the next project to look forward to and go, well, at least I'll have 90 minutes for two weeks when I do that show that I'll be pain free. That's why I keep coming back.

**Q: Those are good reasons, that whole – I mean, I can't – it's no comparison whatsoever, but working in film, I find that no matter how tired I am, suddenly when I'm on set, it's infinite energy. It's like it doesn't make physical sense. I'm like, I can keep just – I guess it's just you're doing that thing that you're supposed to do. And it's magic. It's superpowers almost.**

P1: Yes. I can do things on stage that I can't do in my real life. And my body will catch up with me afterwards and - - -

**Q: Oh, you’ll pay for it later.**

P1: Oh, hugely. We kept my wheelchair in the dressing room during Butterfly Kicks. And I would try and make myself use it after every show. You want to go out there and be standing and talk to people. And it was more to avoid the ableism that you face as a wheelchair user. People don't look at you or people stare, or people will just come up to you and before they say hello, will say, can you have sex? Can you walk? I saw your leg move.

**Q: I mean, I'm speechless when I hear stuff like that. I mean, yeah.**

P1: If you see me in public and I'm not in a wheelchair, that's why I'm not in a wheelchair. My body needs to be in a wheelchair most days now, which is fine. I don't care about – that's fine. It's everyone else's reaction to me being in a wheelchair, that's the problem.

**Q: I mean, I just want to acknowledge just how trash that is. It is just – I mean, I believe every word but I cannot still help be agog when I hear that people talk to strangers like that. It's mind-bending.**

P1: Which I think is why we need media representation of ambulatory wheelchair users in particular.

**Q: Sure.**

P1: Where you can stand, you can get out of your chair, you can cross your legs in public. Because I think people just haven't seen it on Neighbours or Packed to the Rafters, or a Marvel movie. So they don't know this is a possibility. And the only time they see a wheelchair user is someone who's paralysed and can't move.

**Q: Sure. Even if you don't know, you should just mind your damn business. Just don't ask people stuff. Tune into my other podcast, Aaron's Rant.**

P1: Old man shouts at cloud.

**Q: That is me. But you bring me back to – that's beautiful. It ties me into something I want to sort of rewind to about – so that's an – I'm a big, scary-looking white man. I can go anywhere, do whatever I want. No-one ever bothers me. No-one ever talks to me. Everyone gets out of my way. And so I'm trying, especially these days, everywhere I go to just, I guess, be aware of what my presence can represent to be intimidating. No-one realises that I'm just this goofy dude inside. I know what I look like. Do you know what I mean? And always, sometimes my presence isn't welcomed in a space. And you'd just be aware of that and back out of the group quiet. You know what I mean?**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: But also I'm just trying to really be conscious of what other people's experiences would be like in any situation that – still I – my partner Ashley was pretty stressed out one evening and I said, why don't you put some headphones on a go for a run? She said, “What is wrong” – and I was like, oh, yeah, you can't do that. That's what I do to relieve my stress. I just go sit in a park in the night-time, get some headphones, I have to worry, right? I'm rambling, but that – you're literally putting your own health and comfort aside to avoid because you're so aware of how other people are. So everywhere you go, it seems like you have to be aware of other people. But also you talk about disabled people relying on other people, like needing community for survival. And I feel like so much of the debate around the vaccines and epidemic, or you talk about this climate change and stuff. A lot of people are thinking of it, perhaps in an individual level. I'll be all right. You know what I mean? I'll be okay with this, but I guess, what am – I'm trying to get at that - - -**

P1: It can't be survival of the fittest. We need each other to survive.

**Q: And we all do.**

P1: Yes.

**Q: It's an illusion. It's a - - -**

P1: Independence is a myth. We've just built a world where certain people have their needs met and certain people don't. Could you fix your own car if a tyre fell off and engine exploded? No.

**Q: I can't even put the chain back on my bike.**

P1: And so we have normalised that there are people who are qualified and you take your car to and they help you, and you give them money in exchange. I need my mum to come over and help me change my sheets because I cannot change a double bed sheets by myself. And, currently, I'm single and usually my ex-partner would fulfil so many of my needs. But then becoming single, you're like, oh, crap. I don't have someone to carry me to the bathroom if I can't walk or to bring me food when I can't cook. So disabled people have to form these communities and rely on people for things that able-bodied people don't. But we're going to need each other.

**Q: We already – like you said, we already do. Right?**

P1: Yeah. Someone makes your food in a restaurant, that's fine. We're not going to think you're less of a human because you didn't cook your own food.

**Q: I mean, I don't know how to grow my own food. I'm trying to.**

P1: That's a skill. Forget the guns, forget all that.

**Q: Forget.**

P1: Learn how to make your own food.

**Q: Can you grow a potato, Aaron? No.**

P1: You're going to die.

**Q: I joke around about it. It's a fun conversation I like to have is like, who would you pick out of your friends to survive the apocalypse with? And I was talking to my brother who's a carpenter and does all his – real self-sufficient dude. And I was like, well, you're on my team. He's like, you're not on mine. I was like, what? What are you going to do? Make a movie about it?**

P1: Yes.

**Q: Yeah. Someone needs to tell our tales, Jesse.**

P1: But that's the thing. People won't pick me for their team because I'm physically weak. My body can't run and lift heavy things and scale a building. If we had to. Why would you want me on your team? It felt very – like, watching Squid Game, particularly when they picked teams for tug of war, I was like, I would die.

**Q: Right.**

P1: I would die so quick. And before I became disabled, I was a strong, active fit, healthy human. I'm intellectually smart. I think I'm a nice friend. I'm a good artist. And seeing my value decrease to other people, and seeing people who were friends or colleagues completely change how they interact with me just because I sit down. We're currently doing this interview on wheelie chairs.

**Q: Oh, I've been sitting down. It's great.**

P1: How is a wheelie office chair any different to my wheelchair in many ways? But for my metaphor right now, they are the same.

**Q: They're all the same. Same analogy. I mean, look, I – we could dive into this for a whole other hour. I guess something that I want to say as an able-bodied guy is that the more – you say by writing stories for queer kids, they can see themselves and for disabled people. But there's so much benefit to those stories being told for everyone.**

P1: Everyone.

**Q: Because it's the cornerstone of story is that they're all about all of us. All of them. The more specific you get with this – the more specific you are, the more universal the appeal.**

P1: It is, yeah.

**Q: So the more that we can all engage with varied voices, varied representations, it just makes everything better.**

P1: Yeah. And marginalised people are very familiar with that. We've spent our lives figuring out how do I empathise with Tom Cruise in Mission Impossible? So now it's your turn. You have to be figuring out how – and I have to do it as well – how do I see myself or relate or enjoy or engage with a story about old Asian men or someone who's got completely different life experience to me.

**Q: Nelya, who was first guest, she asked me that question. We were talking about this too. She asked me if I see myself in movies, and my brain sort of failed me at the time. I didn't have a good answer for her, but I was like, I'm going to think about that. And I have been. And, you know, white, cis man I grew up and I had James Bond, I had Indiana Jones, I had Batman. Essentially look like me. Do you know what I mean?**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Very easy for me to paste myself onto that and live that adventure in that movie. But it really got me thinking about what the movies that I do love, that I do return to, the characters that I just I think about all the time. It's like, well, what am I seeing in that that's a reflection on – or that I recognise, what do I recognise in those things. And still don't have a great answer for that. But it's really interesting to ponder. And it's not just a bunch of white guys. It's like, oh, that character and that character and that character.**

P1: And what effect does that have on you being told this is who you see yourself in, and they're the protagonist and they're strong and they're desirable.

**Q: Or they're the villain sometimes.**

P1: Yeah. Most of the time, if there's a disabled person, they're the villain. Like James Bond. Every Bond villain.

**Q: Don't get me started now. I walking past a poster, random poster. It's like, what? Can we get past the facial injury means bad guy thing? What decade are we in? And it's absurd.**

P1: It makes me so angry for every young aspiring actor who has a facial difference, who will be told all through acting school, you're not going to get work because you look different, to have agents go, no, I'm not going to take you on because you look different. And then Rami Malek, who's having a wonderful career and is a wonderful actor, gets some prosthetics put on his face. I was like, you're stealing this one job. The one role that they could play where you've got the whole range of everything else.

**Q: I was just so aware of just watching the trailer that it's handsome man in the world Daniel Craig fighting disabled villain. Oh, my God. Just the visual of that is just not on.**

P1: Yeah. And I really feel a responsibility. I'm creating workplaces when I create work. I'm saying who can be in the room. And if I write that this is a play with seven white men, I'm creating jobs for seven white men. I'm not interested in that.

**Q: That's interesting. Let's bring this back to your work. That feels like that's a part of the intent of creating it from the ground up.**

P1: Yeah. So for How To Eat Rabbit, even though the characters never discuss gender or queerness in explicit depth, it's written in the casting notes that these are two non-binary or trans people. And it can be played by two cis women, but that has to be your last resort.

**Q: Sure.**

P1: And under no circumstances can either of these roles be played by cis men. Trans men, sure. But the point is that the – I am stating you must hire someone of a marginalised gender for these roles even though it's not relevant to the plot.

**Q: Sure.**

P1: Because I'm creating jobs and that's people who are going to get paid. And I state in that one as well that the disabled character must be played by a disabled or chronically ill actor. Not someone who's related to someone who's disabled, not someone who's able-bodied, because these are people who don't often get jobs. And I strongly believe that we deserve to tell our own stories and to get the profits from telling those stories. It's money. It's contributing to marginalisation. It's not about anyone can play anyone. Maybe in a hundred years we’ll be there. But until – it doesn't go the other way. You are not casting disabled actors as James Bond, as Harry Potter, although he does have glasses, so that is a disability. But my point is – I'll use a different character. If you’re not casting a wheelchair user or someone with a cane or a facial difference as Indiana Jones, then he doesn't get to play the disabled character. That's not how it's working.

**Q: Yeah. The money thing. I mean, at the end of the day, it's the arts industry. This is about paying rent and jobs.**

P1: Yeah. I pay my rent with – the other day I got a bunch of royalties from people buying Butterfly Kicks and people put it on in WA, so I got money from that. And I was like, cool. That's my rent for this week. So whenever I can, it's seeking out people of colour, Indigenous artists. White men are the last people I'm going to collaborate with. Although I love your films, so I would be open to collaborating with you. But when I'm in charge of putting together a team, those are the last people I'm going to be thinking about because they're going fine.

**Q: Yeah, we're doing fine.**

P1: Even if you have to go get a job at Woolies because Jamila didn't cast you in something, you're still doing fine. It's all about the obstacles they're not encountering.

**Q: I get sick of the argument that your approach is exclusionary when it's clearly not. It's actually opening up inclusion for people that have been excluded since the dawn of time.**

P1: Yeah. We've got a lot of catching up to do. There are so many firsts ahead of us, and I want to do those so that they're not firsts anymore.

**Q: Yeah. Well, we were talking right before we rolled about just how many times we hear, it's the first Asian woman to blah and, like, how is that the first? That there's so many of those things that are still the first time it's happening. Just yesterday Adelaide United soccer player.**

P1: The first.

**Q: The first openly gay. Couldn't believe it. Wild. Oh, yeah, dude. Good for you.**

P1: All these grant applications and companies wanting innovative original work, cool. Come to me. I've got innovative original work.

**Q: Anyone out there who's listening.**

P1: I have numerous plays available for licensing and production. Like, what do you need? Do you want something about disability? Do you want about queerness? Do you want - - -

**Q: I got one act, I've got two acts.**

P1: I do. I've got one person shows. I've got all so many things. But if you want originality and innovation, go hire people that don't get to tell their stories. Because even if it's just not about their lived experience, they're still ground-breaking.

**Q: What do you find, and we'll move this to – we'll tail this out soon. But are there, outside the physical and the broader systemic stuff, are there attitudes or things like that that are still barriers to getting in those rooms with the people in charge?**

P1: Hugely. And I was told, don't let anyone know you're queer. Don't let anyone know you're non-binary or that you're disabled or ill, because then they won't want to work with you. Because otherwise I'm like a thin white femme human who's more trustworthy, who is more bankable, more same as them. So they can trust and they go, oh, you do good art.

**Q: Or, like, we know what we are dealing with.**

P1: Yeah. I think it's – because it's unknown, it's scary. And I think people want – it's a big old tribal instinct of, like, stay with the safe people who look like me.

**Q: Yeah. We know what we’re dealing with.**

P1: We know what to expect.

**Q: My instincts are telling me that, oh, if we bring someone in new, they might – yeah, they'll try to change things. Oh, they might hold us accountable. You know what I mean? The same old lazy decisions we keep making aren't going to stand up. [00:46:23]**

P1: We'll have to do a lot of work.

**Q: They're going to make you work. I reckon that's 90% of it.**

P1: Yeah. People being complacent and comfortable, and not wanting to give up power or perceived power.

**Q: Yeah, for sure. For sure.**

P1: Also, not wanting to confront their own transphobia, ableism, racism, sexism. They don't want to be the bad guy.

**Q: Yeah, man. I mean, it is work and it is. It can be really confronting, you know what I mean? Thoughts will pop into my head and [00:46:58] where the hell did that come from? It's been here the whole time. Let's figure that out. It doesn't feel good.**

P1: No. And I'm ableist. I grew up in a world that made ableism the norm and I have to undo that within myself and just be prepared to do the work.

**Q: Yeah. Don't make me do the work. Let's wrap this up with final question. What's next? What does the future hold for you?**

P1: Ah, it's so exciting at the moment. You've timed this interview very well.

**Q: Love it.**

P1: I am going to be stepping into a really exciting role. I'm going to be leading a project that will be researching, developing, and advocating for a report that tells us how we can improve disabled inclusion in Australian film.

**Q: Far out.**

P1: So I'm working with Back to Back Theatre on that. They made their first feature film last year that I was in, which was a 100% disabled cast. And every head of department behind the scenes had a disabled intern.

**Q: Cool.**

P1: So they were getting upskilled. So they - - -

**Q: That's great.**

P1: And I've seen it. They are getting gigs now because they have that experience.

**Q: That's fantastic.**

P1: So it was wonderful. And because I did that feature with them and they've followed my career since then, they were like, oh, you're the perfect person to lead this project. So I get to talk to all the big production companies and the big producers and research and interview them. I was like, what's your obstacles? Why aren't you including us? And be really honest and frank about it, so then I can come up with a plan. And I've got some really good ideas of how inclusion can improve, but I get six months to research it and hear from other people and other artists that do work with disabled artists, and the disabled artists themselves. And then have this beautiful, shiny report that people can actively implement.

**Q: That's so exciting. I mean, I love, especially the film industry and it's just so many departments and that's really cool. I mean, I love making movies more than anything. And the idea that there's someone out there that loves it as much as me, but there's something that could be changed that is stopping them being included in that, it's tragic.**

P1: Yeah, I'm really excited. And it's really flexible, which is great. So that if I do have a flare up and can't work for a week, fine. I'll just work twice next week. And it means I can also keep doing projects. So my show Benched is a one-person show that I've done three times this year already through different seasons, and I'll be doing it twice more at least next year, touring it to Sydney and Melbourne, which is yet to be officially announced with who is presenting those. But it's very exciting, who is presenting those. And continuing to pitch Benched to other states and other places in essay as well so that it'll have more of a life. And I'll keep writing and writing horror films with disabled leads.

**Q: Excellent.**

P1: Horror is the perfect genre to explore disability. I always say that I feel like a final girl fighting to survive to the end of the movie. And run on Netflix as a wheelchair user as the lead, and just the added tension - - -

**Q: Oh, yeah.**

P1: - - - of someone whose body is an obstacle as well as the ableist and accessible world being a huge obstacle when you can't just run away from the – yeah, you literally can't run up the stairs or down them. Just so busy.

**Q: I love to see someone with a lot on their plate.**

P1: So much. I'm also doing disability access consultancy on the next show at Rumpus, which is Hamlet in the Other Room by Good Company Theatre, which I love to do. And I'm working with Andi Snelling doing access consultancy on accidental radical development. And I'm sure I'm going to keep picking up dramaturgy gigs and probably more access consultancy and writing for articles and things.

**Q: Getting some sleep in there somewhere, I imagine.**

P1: Yeah. I am actively trying to have weekends.

**Q: You've got to enforce that, right? I'm trying to do the same thing myself.**

P1: It's really hard when you're freelance and you're juggling so many gigs. And you might have a more lean month where you're not making so much.

**Q: Sometimes you just got to get it done.**

P1: Yeah. It's really hard to say no to things, even if I know it will overload me. But I'm really trying to actively push back against capitalism as well in my own practice and take my breaks and go to the - - -

**Q: And not feel guilty about it.**

P1: Yeah, which is a huge thing when I became disabled. You can clearly tell I'm a workaholic. I love my work. I wouldn't be this way if it was working at Subway. But it's – when your body forces you to stop, you have to become comfortable with resting. And some days I can't even do good resting. I'll be so sick. I can't watch TV.

**Q: Sure.**

P1: And I try and – when I have to take rest to maintain a healthy body as much as I can, I'll be like, cool. I'm going to watch six episodes of this show today, and I feel like I've achieved something. A little hack for my brain.

**Q: That's good. That's good.**

P1: But I am trying to go rollerblading, which I know will cause a flare and I won't better walk afterwards, but I want 30 minutes of rollerblading.

**Q: Hell yeah.**

P1: And see my friends and spend time resting.

**Q: So listeners out there, I hope you've had a restful time listening to us.**

P1: Yeah. Lie down, listen to this. Make sure you pee on your paid time, not on your break.

**Q: That's right. Exactly.**

P1: Make good art.

**Q: Always make good art.**

P1: Buy my plays. Come see my stuff. Pay me, hire me.

**Q: Well, it's been a pleasure talking to artist/salesperson Jamila. Thanks so much. That was awesome.**

P1: Thank you so much. That was a great conversation.

**Q: Thanks again to Jamila for being a great guest and for being far more articulate than I. For up-to-date information on everything that's happening at Nexus Arts, please visit www.nexusarts.org.au. Thanks to Art South Australia's Recovery Fund, we are once again presenting our visual arts exhibitions online in 2021. Head to nexusartsgallery.com to experience the work of all our amazing artists. We're also thrilled to be partnering with Spark Brewery and Rose Kentish Wines this year. Come in and taste their wares at Nexus Arts venue and be sure to seek out these amazing, local, socially responsible labels wherever you choose to have a drink. Talk to you next time.**

**END OF RECORDING: (54.27)**