**(Job 95714) S01E07 Auslan**

(I: Interviewer, P: Participant R: Recording)

R: Before we begin we’d like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that we are recording on. The Wurundjeri-William Clan and Tongeren people and give our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. We encourage everyone listening to consider the traditional owners of the land that they’re living and thriving on and consider the benefits that may come from a treaty with the first peoples. This is, was and always will be Aboriginal land.

 [Music]

I: Kate Hood is an award-winning actor, director and disability arts advocate with a career spanning more than three decades. For over 20 years, she worked extensively in Australian theatre, film, television and voice over, including credits with Melbourne Theatre Company, Adelaide State Theatre Company, and productions like Pygmalion, Hotel Sorrento, Blue Heelers and Prisoner. After becoming a wheelchair user, Kate launched the second chapter of her career, this time as a disabled artist and change maker. She has written and performed her own work, directing some major festivals and narrated award-winning audio books. Her play Ruthie was developed with support from Writers Victoria.

 As a passionate advocate for disability representation in the arts, Kate has served on the Board of Arts Access Victoria, co-chaired the Performers with Disability Committee and was Deputy Chair of Equity’s Diversity Committee for seven years. Kate is the founder and artistic director of Raspberry Ripple, a professional theatre company dedicated to inclusive storytelling and collaboration between disabled and non-disabled artists. Kate’s recent credits include Cost of Living, Escaped Alone, Take Over and The Real And Imagined History Of The Elephant Man. Kate also recently served as Artistic Associate at Melbourne Theatre Company. Hi Kate.

P: Hi Nicole, how are you going?

I: Good thank you so much for talking to me today.

P: My pleasure, absolutely.

I: That is such an impressive bio. Can we go all the way back to the start?

P: Yes.

I: What brought you into the arts and performing specifically?

P: I think the thing that really brought me into it was seeing a play when I was about seven years old and I saw a play called Smugglers Beware at New Theatre in Sydney, where I was brought up and I knew, that’s what I wanted to do, to be on stage, you know, to be an actor. So, I ended up leaving school pretty early, I left school when I was 15, because I knew what I wanted to do. So, I went, moved to New Zealand, went to drama school over there. I worked with the Mercury Theatre in Auckland for five or six years something like that and then came back to Australia and the rest is history basically. It’s all in that, the bio that you talked about.

 But I’ve got to say that when I became disabled in 2007 and became a wheelchair user, that there was immediately the sound of shutting doors in my face and since then I’ve been fighting the idea that just because a person has a disability does not mean that they can’t act, that they can’t work in theatre or television or whatever, a jobbing actor might do. So, there is a very big conversation that needs to be happening with drama schools like NIDA and WAAPA and VCA in Australia, about what they have in place to provide access for people with disabilities who want to audition for those courses. So, I don’t know what you think about that Nicole, but I think it’s a really important thing that people with disabilities have access to exactly the same pathways as everybody else, as people without disabilities. I think it’s crucial and I think it’s crucial for the development of the industry as well.

I: Are you finding that people misunderstand and think that inclusion means more roles about disability? Are you finding that people conflate the two?

P: Yes, absolutely. What I’m finding at the moment, having done Cost of Living last year and I did it at Sydney Theatre Company and Brisbane Theatre, Queensland Theatre I should say, and Priscilla Jackman directed it and she’s probably one of the top directors in Australia, I would say and also Dan Dorr. Which was fantastic because Dan is a disabled actor, and he also acted in the show. It was really wonderful, to have him in the room during rehearsals. But back to your question, yes, I think that what people see is, you know, the capability of a person with a disability is only to play the role of a person with a disability and I don’t see that. Because out there in the world, we are mothers, we are fathers, we are siblings, we are neighbours, we are prisoners, we are dentists and doctors and nurses and we are teachers, we are song writers. We are all of the above, so I can’t see why we can’t be cast in those roles.

I: In terms of when you developed your disability, if that’s the right term.

P: Acquired I suppose is the right one.

I: Acquired. When you acquired our disability, did you have the thought that maybe you should do something else or was there never a question and you were going to continue acting?

P: Oh absolutely, I got the message very loud and clear that I was not going to have my career, very loud and clear. In fact, I never expected to be on stage again, after years and years of nothing in that area, happening for me, except the work that I’d created for myself. I did not expect to be doing a play in the mainstream again. So, my story is that I went and studied psychotherapy because I wanted to do something which was aligned to performance and basically being an actor is understanding the human condition, that’s what you’ve got to do.

 So, I thought psychotherapy was fairly closely aligned to that. I thought that I would be a counsellor for people with acquired disability because there is none. There was none for me. You know the experience of becoming disabled is the experience of not having what other non-disabled people have got one foot in both worlds, I understand what that is. So, I feel I’m uniquely placed to add to the industry and talk about this stuff.

I: Do you find that having one foot in both worlds, presents it’s own set of challenges? It’s harder for people to put you into a box, so to speak?

P: Definitely. It definitely does. But I should finish what I was saying before, because in the studying of psychotherapy, of course you work on yourself and doing work on myself, I realised that what I really wanted was to retain my chosen profession. So, I decided that I was going to come back, and I was going to come back, and I was going to advocate for people with disability, for artists with disability, to be seen on mainstream stages and television and film. I’m still doing that, I’m still saying the same things as I said back in about 2011, something like that. So, I’ve been going for quite a long time talking about this with people, with other professionals, I’ve always known in the industry.

 But the resounding thing that I experienced as a person with an acquired disability is that, now that I’m a wheelchair user, people don’t think I can play anything but a wheelchair user and I find that really strange and I think that creative people like directors and producers and people in mainstream, need to do some thinking about that. I think that really people don’t know what to do with me, that’s what I think.

I: I get the sense that, and I’d love to hear your comments on this, that if people have been inclusive cast, or are in an inclusive theatre group that they feel like they are doing the right thing and they almost give themselves a pat on the back, rather than it just being the norm, that some people have disabilities.

P: Yeah, exactly. I mean there are circumstances where a production will be mounted about say an autistic person and that production will be directed and played by non-autistic people and so it’s not made accessible for autistic audiences to come and see the show. That kind of thing I find disgraceful.

I: What would be, this show could be a whole podcast series of it’s own, but what would be something that you would say is one of the biggest misconceptions that the mainstream theatre company or just performance in general have about including somebody with a disability?

P: Basically, what the industry really expects from people with disability is that they are going to fit into a structure which has already been made, and which doesn’t necessarily suit them. Actually what we are talking about, and I think that the crucial thing that has to happen is that people need to stop making assumptions about people with disability not being able to fit in. But the people who teach at drama schools and educational institutions for the arts, need to actually do their homework and they need to get educated about disability and accept that they are not the experts in that. They have expertise maybe in voice or in movement.

 For example, I’ve had a person who teaches movement come to me and say, “Hey Kate I like to start my classes with skipping and how would I include a person in a wheelchair in skipping?” My response to that was to say, “Well why don’t you ask the person in the wheelchair?” Because we’ve got our own version right, we know what our bodies are capable of. Also, why does this person want to start the class with skipping in the first place? Is it because it’s a group activity or is it because they want everybody’s heartbeat to be raised, like going for a run would raise a heartbeat, is that what they want?

 Because if that’s what they want to achieve, well then maybe the person in the wheelchair doesn’t have to actually skip, but maybe the person in the wheelchair needs to go really fast, if they’re in a manual chair, for example. Maybe the person in the wheelchair is actually able to weight bear and maybe that person can do, sits or stands while everybody else is skipping. You know, it’s a creative thing that people need to talk through and you know they are saying nothing about us without us, well I think that teachers need to adopt that sentiment when dealing with people with disabilities, student with disabilities. But I think, at the moment, they are focusing on people with invisible disabilities because that’s easier for them to deal with.

 A worry I’ve got about that is that every person with a disability is going to have access needs, right. So, a person who is neurodivergent, for example, is going to have certain access needs. I want to make sure that those access needs are met and that we have a standard which includes people providing an access rider to somewhere like a drama school or a theatre or a television station or whatever, and that that access rider is understood by the people who have to work with the disabled person.

I: I agree with you wholeheartedly. I just want to get your comments on one thing that I’ve been trying to work through in my own mind which is, on one had we are saying, ask us what we need and then on the other hand, some people have a problem with constantly educating or being seen as the person that’s got to educate able bodied people about what they need. So, it’s a difficult balance between like we shouldn’t have to always educate people, but then if we do, that’s okay as well.

P: Yeah, I mean it’s a really difficult one, because people don’t know. For example, when I was doing cost of living, I was on tour with three wheelchairs. I had a wheelchair for the show, a wheelchair for my personal use and a wheelchair to travel with. There were three in my dressing room every night. Of course things break down and need fixing and there was one night where my show chair just wasn’t working and so I had to go on with my personal chair. But it’s about, you know, for me as an experienced actor, I’m thinking about the dramaturgy of disability and the dramaturgical choice I made about the chair I wanted to use on stage. We need to have those conversations as well.

 Because what I mean by dramaturgy is that the actor needs to make choices around the character they’re playing and around the wheelchair they are using, for example, or other aids they are using, as it affects the character, not necessarily as it affects them. But as it affects the character and the director of the show needs to come on board to have conversations about that. But people are a little frightened to do that at the moment, they are really scared of using the wrong language, offending someone, saying the wrong thing. I think we’ve got to, I often find myself being very generous with people, overly generous with people when I should not have to be really, but that’s where we are right now.

I: I made a medical appointment the other day and on the phone I asked them about access because I’d never been to that medical clinic before. They were asking me questions about whether or no I could get out of the chair, which were just practical questions, but then they fell over themselves trying to be so apologetic, saying, “I’m sorry that I asked that question.” Or most likely they were embarrassed that they had to ask. I was spending my energy reassuring them and saying, “These are important things for you to know in order to give me the right information.”

P: Correct yeah. It is so annoying isn’t it, oh my God.

I: It’s just like people are embarrassed to ask questions.

P: Yeah. They’re afraid of getting it wrong and being sued and all that kinds of stuff. But I’ve had the experience of being in hospital for example, and a doctor coming around with a gaggle of medical students and describing me as wheelchair bound to those students and I put my hand up and said, “Excuse me, I’m a wheelchair user. I’m not wheelchair bound, and that is the wrong terminology for you to be using as a medical professional.”

I: Bound sounds like you are strapped into a chair unable to get out, like almost like a prisoner.

P: Correct. My logic goes like this, my wheelchair frees me, it doesn’t bind me. It allows me to get out there, out the door and into life. It allows me to do the things that I do, it allows me to perform on stage. It allows me all of the freedoms that everybody else has, you know. But of course, I still can’t get into every shop or every building. I still can’t have a cup of tea with my mates if they’re able bodied and they live in a house which has got steps, for example, or something like that. So, we have an enormous amount of work to do just in being able to live in an ablest world as a person with a disability. It’s intense.

I: You sound like you adapted to being a wheelchair user quite well, was that always the case or did you make a decision?

P: I think it took me probably about ten years after diagnosis, after becoming a wheelchair user to actually be comfortable in my own skin and say, “Well this is it, this is what I’ve got”. That’s the thing that we’ve all got to do right? We’ve got to say, “Well this is my life”. But that doesn’t mean that I’m incapable of doing anything. I mean I don’t know about you Nic, but I’m patronised by people all the time and I find that really unacceptable. There are things that I really arch up about. I’m not kind to people in certain situations, I just tell them what I feel about things, you know.

I: I found that I was never a swearer until a coupe of years ago and now if I get patronised, I just work out a way to put a curse word into conversation that kind of shocks people out of being patronising.

P: Yes, I mean I maintain really firmly actually that in Australia we’ve got people who adhere to the parity model of disability, very much, and that’s across the board. This is the model that says, you’ve got to feel sorry for those people and be nice to them, you know. I find that disgusting, I really do, because I don’t want to be pitied, I want to be considered a part of the human race and that is after all who we are.

I: We’ve talked a lot on this throughout this podcast series that I’m doing about people educating themselves as to what inclusion looks like? Do you have an example of a performance or a theatre performance I guess where you thought, this is how it should be done?

P: Yes I do actually because I did a very long development for a show and a very lengthy development included the director and the producer of the show making sure that I had everything that I needed. So I could actually make myself a cup of tea in a break or I could easily get in. I could use the toilet easily and I actually forgot that I was disabled. I actually forgot. That was a really great moment for me because I had to leave that show in order to do Cost Of Living and we had a big meeting, yeah, what are we going to do here. We need to replace what Kate is doing, we need to get somebody in to play her, possibly. A non-disabled person put her hand up to do it and I actually said “Yes”. Went, “Oh, hang on a minute it’s got to be a wheelchair user, it can’t be you. It’s got to be a wheelchair user.”

 So, ultimately what we did is we hire Mia Boonen who is a wheelchair using actor and she played me, and I recorded my bits and they put them on film and they made a show which included footage and live acting, and you know, it was all wonderful, it worked really well. That’s my example, because I believe that when access is provided for people, they should actually not feel disabled. That is, the lack of access, is what causes disability and not our bodies.

I: The social model.

P: One hundred percent yeah.

I: Could you tell me about founding Raspberry Ripple?

P: Oh yes, well I founded Raspberry Ripple because I looked around me and I saw that there was some companies like Back to Back in Victoria, that’s an amazing company and it’s got an amazing director and philosophy and it employs disabled artists as actors and so on, but the company is run by a non-disabled. I could not see anywhere around me a company that was run by a disabled leader, a disabled artist, disabled artistic director and I had done a course with Jo Barrant who came over her from the UK and in doing that course, we talked about leadership styles and what leadership was. I thought, mm okay, I’m experienced in this area of theatre making, I think I’m going to form a company which is disability lead basically. I’m going to lead it and I’m going to use disabled and non-disabled artists in this company, because we share the world. We breathe the same air all the time. It’s common for us to be together, but in my company, what I like to do is to make work, from the point of view of disability but use non-disabled people as well.

P: That’s interesting because I often feel like having just the disabled company or having just a disabled theatre group or something is it’s own form of segregation.

P: Yes, that’s right. I hate that, I really hate the siloing that goes on, the separation between disability and non-disabled people. I think it’s contrary to what we want to see. It certainly is contrary to what I want to see, you know. I want to see everybody together all the time. I want to see disabled writers in writing rooms. I want to see a disabled person, actor on neighbours, I want to see disabled directors in theatre, I want to see all that.

I: In a lot of ways, it’s frustrating that we’re still having this fight, and these conversations. Are you finding that it’s getting better and the response to Raspberry Ripple is more positive?

P: Yes, it is getting better, but very slowly. I’m still saying the same things that I was saying a very long time ago. Change takes time absolutely and the idea of including disabled artists in the making of work really puts the cat amongst the pigeons for some people, it really does. You know, we are still talking about drama schools, training artists with disabilities, students with disabilities and agents taking actors with disabilities on and producers thinking about that. It should be just normal as far as I’m concerned.

I: What keeps you going, what makes you think it’s your fight to have?

P: Everything I do, absolutely everything, my acting, my directing, my writing, is all in order that the next generation of disabled artists has an easier time of it than I did, everything that I do is for them.

I: As somebody that does improvised theatre, I just want to say thank you for everything you are saying because it is making a difference even if you can’t see it.

P: Oh, thank you, thank you very much Nicole. I mean I think it, slowly, slowly catchy monkey, it’s that. I think that we need to have the same things in place for us as everybody else has. It’s not okay that we don’t, that’s what I would say.

I: From my own experience of living with a disability and the working in a disability organisation, sometimes I get home and I’m just like, I want to talk about anything else other than disability. So, then if you put advocacy on top of that it becomes a lot. Are there ever times when you want a break.

P: Oh, look I watch Netflix, or I go out with friends, or I do something for myself, completely for myself. I’m very excited at the moment because I’m about to get a dog and that is going to be absolutely fantastic for me. Because I’m going to get out and about in the community and the dog is going to be a service dog and it’s going to help me. I’m getting older, I’m in my 60s, so you know, I need to have some help around the place. It’s kind of heartbreaking to me that I know what I’m missing out on in my life. When I became a wheelchair user I realised that I was going to go without things. My partner left, I have a completely different set of friends than the set of friends I used to have.

 Some turned their backs on me, this stuff happens you know, and it happens to people when they get cancer as well. It’s not only disability, but we need to articulate it. We need to put it on stage and that’s why I formed Raspberry Ripple, to tell those stories.

I: What sort of achievements has Raspberry Ripple had. I mean it sounds like you are doing great work, are there points that you can point to and say, this is why I keep going, this means it’s working?

P: I can say that I’ve worked with some young able bodied actors and I’ve done a work which was called, “That Old Thing”, which is about, was about sexuality and disability and a non-disabled person choosing to be a partnership with a disabled person and bringing that person to their old friends, you know, to a dinner party and their friends going, “Oh how do we deal with this?”, basically. I did this work in an improvised kind of fashion so that it was different every night. Everybody learnt something from it including me because it was about what is okay for everybody and what is not okay for everybody. Somebody came to see that and said that it was the best thing they’d ever seen because it made them think about love and sexuality in a different way completely. That means a lot to me, a lot.

I: Often when we have disabilities, we are seen as like the brain trust for all disabilities, and we’ll have the answer for access for everything.

P: Yeah.

I: Is there something you’ve learnt, or something that’s surprised you through this work that you realise that you didn’t know?

P: Oh absolutely, I mean I had the revelation that in fact I know an awful lot about wheelchairs, but I have no idea about what it is to be autistic or what it is to be blind or what it is to be deaf. I don’t know. So, I along with everybody else, have to ask really blunt questions of people when I’m working with them. So, what’s acceptable, what isn’t acceptable, what do people disclose, what do they not disclose, what is my choice, what is their choice. These are all very interesting questions to me. I think that we have many, many questions that need answering.

I: What would you say to people that think that it’s all too hard and they don’t know enough to deal with disability, what would you say to those people? Because a lot of people say, well educate yourself. But that’s like something that is very abstract, so what would you say that people should do, if their mind is in the right place and they want to do the right thing, and be more inclusive, what would you say they should do?

P: I would say to those people, remember that we are all different, remember that a wheelchair user is not he same as another wheelchair user. I would say to them, take a risk, ask the unaskable question and if the disabled person in front of you doesn’t want to answer it, they’ll tell you and then you can have a conversation with them about why they don’t want to answer that question and you will learn something and they will learn something. I really believe that we’ve got to go to some uncomfortable places together in order to resolve certain issues in the entertainment industry. We’ve got to do it. I mean as an actor, disabled actor, I disclosed because I’m not embarrassed about my condition.

 I don’t see it as something which I’ve got hide. Let’s face it when I have a costume made for me they need to take my measurements, they need to touch me and that’s fine in the context of getting fitted for a costume, it’s absolutely fine. It’s not fine not to talk about it, that is not fine. If there is a bubble left around things which are unsaid, that causes harm to people and I would say, don’t do it, plunge in and say, “I’m sorry, I might be making a mistake here, but I need to ask you x”.

I: I think in general, if a question is coming from a good place, questions are always a good thing.

P: Absolutely. I would take being given a costume as an example. I had to say to the costume people at Melbourne Theatre Company, for example, when I was fitted for a costume, I can weight bear actually. So, if there is a railing in the dressing room, I can stand up and you can see what these trousers look like on me. Also if you touch me when you are taking measurements or something like that, that is completely fine with me. We each have our own boundaries right about what we will and won’t do and I think that’s fine. I think people need to know what those boundaries are, but they also need to know that hey, every person you deal with is different. Every person is going to have many different choices about disclosing or not disclosing and that’s fine. All they need to know is what our access needs are. They don’t need to know the whole story.

I: In a lot of these podcast episodes, I’m talking to people who have realised that something wasn’t written for them, so they wrote something. Or something wasn’t, there were no theatre roles for them, so they wrote one and acted in it. Which is kind of what we have to do a lot of the time, is make our own work, but there is also a lot of unpaid labour and thought that goes into that. You’ve sort of done a lot of your own work even starting Raspberry Ripple is sort of starting something because there was nothing there for you. Yeah, I just wanted to get your comments on sort of the invisible labour involved in all this.

P: That is a really complex thing because the theatre is seen, for example, the Indy Theatre scene in Australia, requires people to work for nothing often. So, non-disabled people also do unpaid labour, so it’s a very difficult kind of thing, but I would say that the advocacy work that we’ve got to do is always there, it’s always there but we’ve got to do it ourselves to get our own access needs met because there is no one size fits all right. You’ve got particular needs, and I’ve got particular needs, and I’ve got to make sure those needs are going to be met. I might change my mind about this, you know, but it comes back to the thing that we’re all different, to me.

 Being able to have conversations about the work and the making of the work and the dramaturgy and the gift that disability adds to theatre. For example, I had a conversation with somebody recently about the fact that Bill Shakespeare recently did a production of King Lear. There is a role in that play, there is a princess called Cordelia, there were three princesses actually. She’s got two sisters, Regan and Goneril, the role of Cordelia is figural in that play. It’s a play about power, so if they used a disabled actor in the role of Cordelia, what would the rehearsal room be like? What would Cordelia’s relationship with her two sisters be? What would her relationship with her father the king be?

 These questions are really, really interesting to me. I would love to do a production of that play, but it would require a whole lot of money, lots of money and we get the scraps off the end of the table, disabled artists. We aren’t funded very well. So, the money needs to be sorted out as well I think.

I: That may lead me into a question that I wanted to ask which is you can be as political or not as you want with this answer, but what could be done more on a stage or a federal level I guess to change and improve inclusive story telling?

P: Inclusive story telling could be funded well, really well. I mean it takes a lot more than $20,000 to put on a really good show. If you look at the budgets that companies like Sydney Theatre Company and Melbourne Theatre Company have per show, we’re looking at something in the region of $100,000 I would have thought. I mean I’m making that up, I haven’t seen their budgets, but you go and see a show at either of those companies and you see a professional costume designer has been paid, the costumes have been made, there are a bunch of people assigned to do that job alone. There is a sound designer, there is a lighting designer, there is a director, there is however many actors are needed to play the roles, and they all have a weekly salary. It’s a thing, money is a thing and without it we can’t do anything.

I: What’s next for you if I know that you are getting a service dog, but what’s next for you in this space?

P: Interesting question. I am going through a thing where I’ve achieved some notoriety by performing Cost of Living last year, but it hasn’t lead to anybody offering me work. That has not happened. So I’m going, mm, what does that mean? Is that because everybody in the theatre world, the mainstream theatre world believes that I can only play a role written for a person in a wheelchair with a disability or is there another reason or is it just because people don’t work that often in the industry, that’s the truth too, that happens. I don’t know. So, I would say, I’ve got something coming up later in the year, there is a show I do with Raspberry Ripple called Risky Business and I sold that to a Council in Melbourne, and we are going to be doing the show with them.

 It is a show which is part panel and part performance. I get three disabled performers together and they also make up the panel and the panel is facilitated by a disabled person as well and we sit around and we talk about what needs to happen within the arts and each of them gets up and performs for ten minutes, about ten minutes in the show and then everybody goes home. There is a Q&A at the end of it, so the audience can ask any question that pops up for them and it's a really interesting thing, because we get an exchange happening between non-disabled people and disabled people. That I think is really, really necessary. I should really say disabled artists and non-disabled audience members get to speak to one another.

I: Which is a bigger deal than it seems as we were talking about before. A lot of it seems very segregated.

P: It is yeah.

I: I was in a play last year written by Cath Duncan and I could have put money on the people that were there being there. I was saddened by the fact that it didn’t get more of a mainstream look.

P: I hate that, I really hate it. You know we need to get audiences of non-disabled people in to see our work. We need to work out how to do it. I’ve taken myself to them in a way. I’m very lucky because I was non-disabled until I was in my 40s so I went to drama school, and I got known in the industry. I had done musical theatre for example, and I had done audio books, and I had done voice over work, and I could get into those studios. But all of that stopped for me because suddenly I didn’t have access. My career as a voice over artist came to a crashing end when I could no longer walk upstairs to get into a studio. There is all that stuff and people are really okay with it, which is really okay with it which is amazing to me.

I: It seems to me that there is a huge diffusion of responsibility.

P: Absolutely, it’s kind of like we have to pull it along, as if they have got a nose ring or something and say to them, “Look at this”, and they’ll look at that. Imagine how it would be for you. I was talking to somebody just this morning actually about the fact that disability is not included on the list of diversities. So, we have institutions which are about diversity, and they’ve got the word “diversity” in their title, but they don’t include disability. It means BIPOC it means Aboriginality, it’ll include things but not disability and I find that disgraceful.

I: The cynical part of me thinks diversity is sometimes just used as a word to tick a box.

P: Absolutely, diversity and inclusion are words which I rarely use these days. I use diversity and disability quite a lot because I don’t accept that if I use the word diversity, disability is going to be included, it isn’t.

I: If somebody is listening to this who is an audience member that loves theatre or performance and wants to support inclusive theatre making, what’s something that they could do?

P: Make sure their access needs are met, make sure they’re met, absolutely. But also make sure that they’re going into an accessible space. It’s incredible to me but it’s true that the art centre in Melbourne is not a completely accessible space. I’ve been given a wheelchair spot for a festival that was on there and I could only see half of the stage from that wheelchair spot. But I paid the same amount of money as everybody else. That kind of thing is untenable for me.

I: Quite often it seems like you have to pay more because you have to call up, they have a fee for talking to you on the phone.

P: Yeah, exactly.

I: I should be shocked by that, I’m not, sadly. So, I don’t know what that says about me.

P: Well, it just says that you are used to it that’s all and you shouldn’t be used to it, none of us should be used to it. I have friends who are non-disabled and they put on shows and I, you know, I had a friend come down to Melbourne and do his one man show down there and he chose a venue which was not accessible for me and I said to him, well, it’s not a show I can come to. So, he researched it and wanted to find a space that was accessible for me, couldn’t find one that he could afford. So, access needs to be funded by the Australia Council or Creative Australia it’s called now. And by Creative Victoria. All funding bodies need to have access in their mind when it comes to making inclusive work.

I: Just as a final question, I’d love to know, because we’ve talked a lot about making the world more inclusive, but what is your more specific vision in terms of what you would love your legacy I guess in this work to be?

P: Oh, I guess I’d love to be remembered as the person who used the word “normal” to apply to people with disabilities and that that word was taken up. It’s normal for the human condition to include us and it’s normal for work to be made about that human condition. You know, it’s normal for people to hear our stories and to appreciate them, that’s what I would like to be remembered for. To be remembered as the person who made it easier for the next generation of disabled artists, that’s what I would love.

I: If somebody is listening now and they want to support inclusive theatre or actors with a disability, is there somebody coming up I guess in the next generation that you think is a standout performer?

P: Look absolutely, I would say Dan Dorr is much younger than me, he’s a person who is, I think in his 30s. He lives in Manchester. Over there people are more advanced in the arts, and he’s done his one man show all over Europe. It’s just a normal part of things and people who are non-disabled go and see that show and it’s reviewed, and it’s considered to be critiqued by viewers in the industry. That’s what I want to see. I want to see a world where disability is just a part of things, not special, just a part of things.

I: Is there a model over in England or in the more advanced countries that you can pinpoint that we can follow? Is it just a matter of time?

P: Well, I think both actually because I know that here is a company called Grey Eye, for example, in London which is run by a deaf theatre maker called Jenny Sealey and she only uses disabled artists, only disabled artists. She does work which is in the mainstream. Plays like The House of Bernarda Alba, for example, or Shakespeare, or Chekhov or whatever, modern plays as well. She makes work and there is also Julie Macnamara is one of the leading workers in theatre in the UK and we need to communicate with them. But there is a drama school called RADA in London as well and they’ve got a course designed particularly for students with a learning disability.

 You see those students have become actors and you see them on television, Call The Midwife, disabled actors in Vera or in things like The Accident, which is a series that was written by Jack Thorne, for example. So, you know, the thinking is more advanced over there than we have I think.

I: I want to thank you so much for your time Kate and for all the work that you do for helping performers, of which I would count myself as an up and coming one. Thank you so much for all your work and thanks for your time today.

P: That’s a pleasure and thank you for doing this series of podcasts. It’s really important. I really appreciate being invited onto your show, I really appreciate that.

I: Please send me photos of your dog.

P: Oh yes I will do.

I: Thank you so much Kate.

P: Thank you. See you.

I: Thank you to Kate Hood. Create and Amplify is supported by the Australian Government, Creative Australia, it’s principle arts and investment advisory body. Until next time.

[END RECORDING]