Introductory music

Debbie Hannan: Welcome to the Traverse Podcast with me, **D**ebbie **H**annan. So, theatre has changed. COVID-19 has sent us into a reflective pause. It has inspired art, activism, the examination of power and demanded a new normal as we all invent what comes next. These podcasts are a selection of interviews with the people who are shaping that feature, inside and outside of theatre. This series is inspired by Arundhati Roy’s statement; 'the pandemic is a portal'. So each one is a provocation, which looks to examine theatre making, how we do it, and its place in our new world. Our first guest is the self-titled bionic writer for stage and screen **M**atilda **I**bini. Matilda is an award-winning writer whose most recent production, Little Miss Burden was on at the Bunker Theatre in December, 2019, and was supposed to transfer to the Traverse this August. Unfortunately, COVID-19 stopped little Miss going to Edinburgh, but Matilda was commissioned for Traverse Three, the trial versus new online, all digital venue to write Shielders. A piece of digital theatre/ kind of short film made remotely about three friends who were in lockdown in Glasgow. One friend has to continue shielding, and the piece digs into the emotional toll that takes, alongside a bit of vintage Sci-fi and a whole chunk of Afrofuturism, Matilda, and I are long time collaborators. So we go in deep, we talk quite Missy Elliott Fables and myths, surviving the pandemic financially, and about the theatre industry hanging on to some bad old ways.

Debbie Hannan: Matilda, how are you today?

Matilda Ibini: Hey, Debbie. I am good, thanks. Considering I've got a bit of brain fog today where I just woke up and kind of like my mental faculties are a bit slower today. So like recollecting things, appointments, meetings. I was meant to have I wasn't on the ball today. So I just feel a bit, everything's just feels a lot more slowed down basically.

Debbie Hannan: So you're living in slow-mo.

Matilda Ibini: Yeah, this is my brain fog voice. Like it's much slower and calmer and a little bit quieter than normal.

Debbie Hannan: Yes, I really feel you. I also get brain fog from time to time, and what the brilliant thing is about working with Matilda, and we've always done this in our rehearsal rooms. Whenever we've been together is that everyone is welcome in whatever state they arrive in. And that includes everything related to bodies as well, because the point is that we are allowed to have brain fog.

Matilda Ibini: Yes. And bodies are complicated.

Debbie Hannan: Which actually leads very neatly. Like you knew this, onto my first question, which has about the word bionic. Tell me about describing yourself as a bionic playwright.

Matilda Ibini: Yeah, it came about in 2018. I had broken my leg for the second time. I've promised the universe. I'm not breaking any more bones, but this time, this particular fracture required me to have surgery and they put metal in my knee and someone visited me in hospital and it's like, Oh wow. Now you're kind of part woman, part feminine energy, part machine. And I was like, Oh, that is interesting. In a sense that before then I was already a wheelchair user and I've never thought of my wheelchair as a kind of machine that supports me in that way. I think there's still a lot of talk about when writers call themselves like disabled writers. What's really interesting is like being a disabled writer is more about personhood that like my work isn't necessarily disabled and the work that I create, doesn't always address disability. So I've always had this kind of thing about what's the best way to address myself and my art in a way that encompasses all of that without it having to centre on my disability in a way or centre on the barriers I faced, I kind of stumbled upon bionic. And when I looked it up, it just kind of rung true. It kind of just made sense to me that yes, now that we've got metal physically implanted in me, but also that my wheelchair is a part of me, like when it's broken or it's not working, I'm not able to move or function in the world. It's, it's a part of my spirit almost. So I feel like the word bionic describes my work has just kind of different and out there, but also describes the way I move through the world. And that will have an impact on the stories that I tell.

Debbie Hannan:

I really heard the word personhood there, like disability is personhood. Say that, we've got an able-bodied listener, how would you elaborate on that concept to them?

Matilda Ibini:

I just think I acknowledge it. I mean, it took a long while to acknowledge that I was a disabled person, let alone a disabled writer that was hella hard when you've grown up or the narratives that you've been led to believe. And even things like within your own family, that disability is bad. Disability is wrong. Disability is seen as a negative it somehow, takes away from your personhood as opposed to actually being disabled as a part of my identity. It's what makes me whole, and without it, there's a piece missing and it's not to say that I love my disability or I love my medical condition, but actually all the experiences and all the people that I've met as a result of it. And the way that I live as a result of it makes me feel whole, it makes me feel my most human. So I feel like when I think of my personhood and all the different things about like being creative and being spiritual and being queer and being black and being Nigerian, disability is also included in that, in that puzzle.

Debbie Hannan:

And I think reframing it is not a negation of something is like, what little miss burden did really, as a piece and what actually, what Sheilders does as well.

Matilda Ibini:

So often made to seem like it takes away a part of one's humanity as opposed to adding a richness to it.

Debbie Hannan:

I remember you saying once that, like maybe it was your family or someone had said to you like, well, who would you be with out this? So you'd be, you'd be a wild one. You'd be all over the world. You'd be living wild lives. And I was like, Matilda, like you literally are living multiple wild lives. You’re traveling everywhere and like taking us on journeys. I'd love to hear how you began writing because you've, I mean, that incredible scholarship that got you a masters sounds pretty pivotal. I imagine it began before that.

Matilda Ibini:

I think it started with a love or rather realizing a love for performance. So like most kids, I grew up thinking I wanted to be an actor. I was a very shy kid growing up. I think definitely as a result now that I look back on my condition and not being, not having the language for it and it not being diagnosed. So I just grew up really shy. And my mum came across these use drama groups or local youth drama group that was looking for people to join. That'd be great for your confidence and self-esteem and bring you out of your shell. And my mom thought that'd be perfect for me. And actually when she presented me the idea, I was like, no, I shut it down. I was like, are you mad? Why would I want to go and embarrass myself in a group of strangers that she was just like, let's just go to one it's free. You never know what will happen. What if you just make friends outside of school and stuff like that? Little did I know that was my way into theatre and loving performance and storytelling and telling stories for the stage and interacting with other actors and directors. Unfortunately, as I've got a progressive condition, So as it got worse and as I got older and I had less and less physical mobility and at least back then, I wasn't aware of any like disabled actors or anything like that. And I just thought this is going to get really hard to do. And I'm not going to have fun. Like I wasn't feeling comfortable in my own body, let alone having that body then on stage and rather than completely withdraw from that world and the medium, a couple of different like mentors, like guest speakers who came in, encouraged all of us, actually in the group to try your hand at writing, like writing your own characters and writing scenes and developing your own stories and up until that point, I'd only ever written poetry at school. So I tried my hand at it and was terrible, but I was encouraged to keep going. And as I learned more and more about playwriting, it meant that I could stay in this medium, still hanging out with directors, still hang out with writers, even though I wasn't performing myself. And also still made me feel comfortable in my own body because it didn't, I wasn't required to do anything that I couldn't do. And that's kind of how that journey began. When I went to Uni, I applied through UCAS to study psychology, and last minute I changed it to English Literature and creative writing without telling my mum until after I'd started the course. So she couldn't make me change it back.

Debbie Hannan:

I mean, does your family, like, where are they very supportive or are they like, why are you choosing this path?

Matilda Ibini:

My mum was just worried because one, it was hard to get into Uni anyway. And like psychology is like, at least to a lot of, I want to say immigrant parents, that kind of doctor, lawyer, engineer, those kinds of really formal jobs assure them that you'll get work when you leave. So that you'll be able to be self-sufficient. And because she personally doesn't know much about the writing world and what have you, it just seemed like I was going to waste three years, doing nothing, come up the end of it and realize like, I've got nowhere to go, as opposed to like trying to convince her that there are writers, there are black writers, Mallory Blackman is a writer. And I was reading her books at school. Like I was like clutching at straws, but like Benjamin Zephaniah, he's a, he's a poet, and a writer. And he goes to schools that like mama was like, so you just want to become a school teacher? I was like, no, I wouldn't be a writer. And she was like, well, how much do writers make? I was like, I don't know, but I'm going to find out. But she eventually did like come around because she was incredibly supportive whilst I was at uni. I did things like the Soho writers group and the Royal court writers' program. And back then, I couldn't take public transport like that. My condition had progressed to such a point where I was reliant on my mom or taxis and I wasn't working enough to be able to take taxis everywhere, but my mom, God bless her. She would drive me on a Saturday morning. After working Monday to Friday, I had two part-time jobs to go do these three hour workshops at Soho, or pick me up on her way home from the Royal court writers program. Or even sometimes wait in the car for the duration of that workshop and then bring me home again. So she believed in me, even before I started believing in myself,

Debbie Hannan:

It's mad these like pivotal people on these journeys, I can think of like the industry mentors I've had to change my life, but actually the sort of side players, like my best mate, who let me sleep on her floor for like three months when I was getting established in London and had no money to set myself up. And actually she's this phenomenal scientist who just loves the theatre and kind of like was, you know, my family for those months. And I was a little newbie. I had no idea about anything. She believed I was going to come and like, you know, live it up in London and establish myself. And I really didn't. I was like living off digestive biscuits, questioning what the hell I was doing. So it's so key those moments, isn't it? I was really interesting what you're saying about all the elements of your personhood there. And especially as someone who directed a show that was essentially a bit of auto-fiction. So I got, I got to dive into like a lot of those elements and I think to me, like we've worked now on multiple things and especially on the dramaturgy of those things, I just wanted to ask, if you were to say like, these are the big influences on my storytelling, I guess what, what comes to mind?

Matilda Ibini:

One of the best advices I was given about playwriting or when thinking about writing a story is like write all the things you love into it. Like all the things you love about live performance or just storytelling in general. And then some of the things I love include like music videos. I asked, like I used to watch MTV, VH1, Kiss when they were just like channels. Exactly. Yeah. Like I used to watch endless music videos and how they tell stories in three minutes or less, just off a song. And I was heavily inspired in my head. I see them like short films, those music videos.

Debbie Hannan:

What's like a top music video for you.

Matilda Ibini:

I love Missy Elliott's whole discography because her music videos are not just short films. She's a dancers musician. She makes incredible music to dance to you. Can't help, but want to get up and dance to it. And that's evident in the music videos because then the choreography is so inventive and imaginative and ahead of its time and starting trends of dance. It's brilliant. But I'd say just because this one I keep coming back to reference is Janelle Monae's, I think the song is called many moons. The whole concept of that video is that there are different versions of this Android called Cindy Mayweather and they're walking down a runway for auction. So people are bidding on these different versions of this Android. And the whole video is incredible. It's so like Sci-fi but also really political. And it's just so Imaginative, and clever and really brilliant storytelling because it's my first couple of albums were part of a wider narrative about this love story between a human called Antony Greendown and an android called Cindy Mayweather. And I absolutely love it. And if you listen to her music, they sound like film scores. It's like, you're watching a film in your head.

Debbie Hannan:

This is very you. I can, I can see the connection. So music videos are a big influence.

Matilda Ibini:

Yeah, yeah. And music in general, I think a lot of Nigerian culture has like filtered into my work. And I want to say sometimes unknowingly where I wasn't even aware. I'm a big fan of like bright colours or say like big casts. Like if I had my way, I would always be writing stuff that was like more than six people, like minimum it's budgets I have made me like, okay, is there a way that we can get three people or to play like 20 characters?

Debbie Hannan:

The truth of the playwright?

Matilda Ibini:

I think a lot of my culture has slipped in there in terms of like the music and my references to pop culture, kind of this hybrid of kind of Nigerian culture and London culture. I think I've also slipped in there. So in terms of kind of foods and clothing and, and references to values and belief systems as well, I know once say, say Christianity is slipped in there as well, even though I'm not a practicing Christian anymore. Like I still think I'm constantly like trying to write against it. Not in a way that's rejected, but rather to challenge or the things that I was just kind of forced to believe or told to believe that were true. I'm always like looking at a lot of the values that I was taught to believe as kind of like stories. And if you've told me that story, could I take that and create a new one?

Debbie Hannan:

Yeah. I often look at your work and I think they’re like alternative fables. Oh yeah. They're sort of offered like new myths, myths for now.

Matilda Ibini:

Definitely like my mom, I think is a big influencer of that in terms of her dad used to tell her so many parables growing up and that's kind of how I think my visual imagination grew was because my mum, rather than like telling us off for doing something wrong, she'd explain it to us by a story. She'd say it is like when X does this or it is like, when someone says this, but doesn't follow through. She'd always turn these life lessons. Or when she was like correcting our behaviour or something into a kind of visual narratives. And like one of my favourite ones was the story of when she said, when you think you know better. And it was the story of how the tortoise got the cracks on its shell, because it thought it knew better climbed up a Palm tree and fell onto its back and those cracks on its back or to remind it that you don't always know better.

Debbie Hannan:

Yeah. Don't be so bold would be like, my Irish grandmothers version of that. Yeah, it was a similar like fable-based raising, but I can totally see that showing up in your work. Cause there's a vibrancy to it. Like an emotional connection to the lesson. You'd spoke about visual imagination there. Your writing has a massive amount of visual elements in it. How do you think about that? And the dramaturgy is you're writing. Are you conscious of it? Is it the same for you? Whether you're doing a play or a film?

Matilda Ibini:

That's a good question. I think there's like a version of it. That's like just my everyday official language in my head. And when I'm writing, it's like, I'm trying to distil it in a way that works for that medium. For example, the first TV thing I ever wrote, someone said, this is just a play with different font. Like it was-

Debbie Hannan:

Right.

Matilda Ibini:

It's a really good point because everything happened in one space and everyone said what they felt there. Wasn't like the visual I wasn't using the medium of screen that rather than talking about going somewhere, let's just go there. So it feels really intrinsic for me, the way that I like to process information and process the world and my relationships to other people have their own visual language in my head. But when I'm trying to tell a story, I'm trying to almost like sieve it through a medium about which parts of it is useful, which parts of it is just for me that I just enjoy thinking about and conjuring in my head. But I feel it also comes from only recently realizing that some of that strength of my imagination comes from trauma that like growing up disabled and being like the only disabled person in your family, in your church, in your community, in your school at one point, men, I was just like hella bullied, like horrifically. And I used to just daydream away. Like I couldn't leave physically those environments, but I could leave in my head mentally. And so I just got used to be able to kind of where they weren't friends to begin with. I would just conjure friends in my head where there were horrible experiences that I had. I would rewrite them in my head, how I'd like them to have gone. And it became such a key emotional crutch to be able to deal with the difficulties I was facing in life in terms of like still not being diagnosed, having this condition that was worsening became like a really- a coping mechanism basically. But as we know, coping mechanisms can at times get a little bit out of control.

Debbie Hannan:

Storytelling was your survival and now it's your bread and butter and your life, how that's all intertwined. How do you keep going?

Matilda Ibini:

So that's a really good question. I think one, cause I've had a lot of counselling, so that's helped to be able to like extract who is Matilda without the storyteller who is Matilda when she's not a writer and realize that actually creativity is that intrinsic part of my identity in terms of being disabled means constantly adapting, constantly thinking outside the box, constantly problem solving. So I'm constantly having to engage in my imagination, think problems through try and find a solution or what have you. And so that's always going to be a part of me, but then storytelling has become the coping mechanism that then morphed into a way that felt purposeful. That when I engaged with playwriting and performance, it had such a profound effect on the way that I saw myself, the way I saw the world and my place in it, that I felt a calling to make sure that others get that opportunity to experience that too. And hopefully if that's through my stories or other people's stories or stories, they go on to tell themselves, then I know that my work has done something good.

Debbie Hannan:

Yeah. Your work does do that. I guess I'd love to hear about specifically. So you've got this like brilliant history of who you are as a writer and that you're roots in and it comes like deep from who you are and now 2020- how has lockdown been for you. You've been busy, right?

Matilda Ibini:

Not in the beginning, funnily enough. In the beginning, it was just a whole lot of stress, anxiety, and a lot of suppressed feelings bubbling to the surface. It was less to do with being locked down in my house. Like I've been locked down several times in my house for lots of different reasons, that doesn't scare me at all. What was scary was the team of carers that I employ, having less people available and obviously them having to figure out if they were still able to work. There weren't any clear guidelines about how we navigate this period of time together. Cause just cause there's a lot done, my needs don't just stop. Like I would still need care. What do I do in this instance? I was calling up different, you know, services, but then not knowing the best way to advise.

Debbie Hannan:

I just want to jump in and say, Matilda is a crack business woman because you have to be, when you're you do, you're such, you're like, you're an employer of multiple, of a team of people you manage to like make your care package happen. And you have to like run that business, you know?

Matilda Ibini:

Yeah. Oh definitely. A lot of that felt threatened, but- by the lockdown and, and this kind of restricted movement and, but then also, you know that your government is trying to kill you when in the middle of a pandemic, their first act, their quickest act is to put in a bill, into law as part of the coronavirus bill that local authorities are allowed to strip away any services that they deem not a necessity in this current climate. And you're just like, okay, we knew the cops killed people. Now they're definitely trying to use this opportunity as a way of culling disabled people. It was disgusting. It just angered me. So I was, it was hard not to get depressed that like, wow, even in a pandemic, you still want lots of people who are immune compromised or what have you, or have pre-existing conditions or disabilities. You still want them to suffer. And that's cruelty outside of my imagination. My level of cruelty extends to like Disney villains and a bit of history. You know, the, the very lax history education I got in state schools. Like, you know, I know some of the villains in history, but this is on a whole ‘nother level cruelty. This is like expertise level of cruelty that I've never imagined possible to hate communities, to such an extent you create laws that will shorten their lives. Cause let's be honest, cutting someone's care package or benefit does not save lives, does not make life easier. It shortens lives, it causes pain. It causes suffering. And it just felt like this coronavirus bill was to add to that. So a lot of my time in the beginning was like, how the hell am I going to get through this? If I don't even have a full team of carers. So a lot of that was trying to prioritize. What's the most important things I need right now before I could even think trying to make anything.

Debbie Hannan:

How, amongst all that, have you made work.

Matilda Ibini:

Yeah, I'll be honest, poverty, poverty drives you to work. Like I still have to pay my care package does not cover my overnight care. So that means I've got to pay that somehow other or I don't get overnight care. And if I don't get overnight care, I fall ill. And if I fall ill, then I don't work. So it's been mad having to try and find ways of creating work or finding like who needs a writer in this time? Like we need doctors, we need key workers. It's like, who needs a writer? Like I will happily write whatever, if it means you pay me so I can pay my carers. And that kicked in about, I wanna say a month or two in to the lockdown. So I had like a month of just panic. Oh my God, do I have enough care, to like, Oh my God, how am I going to pay them? And then I was also really fortunate to get a couple of hardship funds because if I didn't get those, the digital commissions alone would have not been enough to touch the sides. Like it was a combination of both of those things that has literally kept me alive because if I didn't have those things, I would, I would hate to think what would have happened, like in terms of falling into debt or what have you.

Debbie Hannan:

Yeah. It's the truth. Isn't it, of that thing of like, I've been in a few theatres and talking about people, having time to like rekindle their creativity because they're less busy and I'm just like, yeah. A lot of the rest of us are just earning our way of not getting ill or not getting hungry.

Matilda Ibini:

Yeah. Yeah. I agree. Once, if I fall and everything, everything crumbles, like if I don't work and I can't pay my carers, everything starts to crumble. I have to work or create to keep a flow, which then meant the stuff that I wrote at least during this period of time, to be honest, none of it was new. What I wrote was literally what I was experiencing. I wrote about the coronavirus law. I wasn't sleeping well. So I wrote about some of the weird dreams that I was having. Like I literally just wrote about the experiences I was having. Cause that's all I could think of when you're in a pandemic. Like I'm not feeling particularly creative or inventive or innovative. I'm just thinking about how do I stay alive? How do I live long enough to see the end of this?

Debbie Hannan:

As someone who like works with you and it's an audience to your work, the audience member, but of me was relieved to see your work because it is, it's like relieving. It's like relieving to see someone speak about the moment I had this mad moment in the middle of lockdown where I was like, nothing's reflecting the world back at me anymore because the world's changed. So severely, overnight fiction has lost It is not even comforting cause that's too soft, but like it's connective power, you know? And I was like looking around being like, where can I find the bits of fiction that keep me like alert and alive and wanting to keep going. And then I think the bits of what you did with the Bush and that we did for headlong, you know, everything you've done because you're so like, you've, you've looked at this moment and you've already made art massively, like personally helped me.

Matilda Ibini:

That's really lovely to hear.

Debbie Hannan:

That’s why I always come back to you to work with you because no one else does it like you, you know, I have a really formal question next, but no, it feels really real after, like I was just going to say, you're somebody who works across farms with a lot of ease, all those things you've made. Take lockdown. Purely as an example, I know you've been working on TV treatments, you've worked on a short film. You've worked on an audio play. What's it like process wise, your writing process shifting between those forums. Is there anything that guides you or do you just go where your heart takes you?

Matilda Ibini:

It's a bit of both in a sense. So I've had opportunities in the past to try those out. I've written in the past a lot of duds to like bad short films and bad radio plays. And I feel like with more opportunity that I've had to write in those mediums, hopefully I'm getting better at it because maybe some of those bad work on online for people to access. It just makes it look like everything that I write is like better. And I'm just like, Oh no, it's just cause you haven't seen the other shit stuff. So there's that and writing across mediums. So I like to think of myself as a storyteller. I don't ever want to feel beholden to one medium. When a story comes, when a character comes, when an idea or a theme or something, I'm trying to find the best medium to tease it out. Like which medium will help me get this story out of my head is what I'm thinking. And sometimes it's writing in one medium to discover that it's not that medium so that I've tried it as a play and it didn't work. I've tried it as an audio thing and it was slightly better. I've tried it as a short film, ding, ding, ding. So it's kind of testing it. So sometimes I kind of like in a lab and I'm testing out these stories in different shapes. And does it work as this? Does it work as best? Does it work as this? like lately I've been exploring a potential idea for a potential graphic novel, not to say that I know how to write graphic novels, but I like reading them. So there's something in that and if it doesn't work out, that's fine. But if it does great, I have these stories that I want to tell or I'm inspired by things, my experiences or things that happen to people I know. And I'm trying to find the right medium that has the most impact when it is shared with another person.

Debbie Hannan:

Hmm. That makes total sense, I guess as well. You've been part of the freelance task force during this time. So you've been part of these conversations about specifically the theatre industry, reassessing itself in this strange chasm of a pause that we find ourselves in. What do you want to see in the future?

Matilda Ibini:

I think the pandemic has highlighted that the industry was always very fragile. It's not new news, that the industry has held up 70% by freelancers. Like that's not new information. It was just, it was accepted that people work more but earned less than what they worked for. It was just accepted and the pandemic has stopped everyone. And everything is then forced the industry's hand that this will no longer be tolerated because when it's a life and death situation, exploitation is not in the equation. We cannot be trying to save one another's lives while also exploiting one another. And I feel like that has come up to the surface. And because there are some things that we know has always been a problem in the industry. This is an opportunity to bring everything to the surface, the things that were hot topics in terms of like representation and sick pay and things like that. It's like, okay, if we're going to address those things, let's address all the problems. Everything let's not leave anything off the table that's for discussion and how can we make it better than it was doing before. At least some of the conversations that I've been listening to or been a part of. So it feels like there's a part that's like burn it down and we'll build a new from the ashes, which I'm here for. I'm always here for burning things down. I love it. I'm not, I'm not a self-confessed off the base, but if it means we get to start again, then let's do it. So like there's another part of the conversation where it's about kind of reform, how can we change what we've got? How can we get people to change their behaviours or ways of working or contracts or what have you. And I think both are valid. I feel like a little bit, maybe those conversations are happening slightly separately. And I feel if there's a way of bringing those conversations together, that yeah, we need to burn down your work structure so that we can build a new so that now we incorporate sick pay. We incorporate childcare, we incorporate reasonable working hours, flexible working hours. The ability to work from home when necessary to have zoom meetings, instead of asking people to come down from another city for 10 minute coffee chat, if there are ways of bringing both those things together so that we're able to then use that to address all the problems in our industry, that would be amazing.

But we're still like with Britain's history in terms of not acknowledging it's racist and imperialist and colonialist history, theatre doesn't even want to address the fact that it's been hella harmful to so many people there. It doesn't want to accept the fact that it has been hella racist and has helped uphold white supremacy. It has been, hella sexist and dangerous and has harmed people for the worse. And if it can't even acknowledge that in terms of its hiring, its pay structure, it's the shows that it's programmed, it's historical programming. If you can't even address the fact that yeah, we fucked up, but we're trying to do better than it feels like when we're going to be going around in circles for a really long time, because how can you want to change something if you can't even admit that it was a problem to begin with?

Debbie Hannan:

Does it want to change?

Matilda Ibini:

Oh, that's a good question. It doesn't seem like it from the outside, Debbie, I can't lie to you theatre, like capitalism, is holding on for dear life that it thinks once the lockdown has completely stopped and we are back to, you know, it's safe to be an out again because of the vaccine or whatever. I thinks it could just go back to normal and it's like, no, you're not allowed to, we were not going to let you because if 70% of the workforce was freelancers, if we refuse to work, who will do those jobs?

Debbie Hannan:

We're in the shifted space now and what that means for like reassessing the dynamic, reassessing the power structures. I think it can only go back through a massive regression, like a deliberate step backwards, which is totally possible because as you say, all of history, but once a fire starts, you know what I mean?

Matilda Ibini:

Well, yeah, absolutely. If I didn't believe change was possible, I would have left this industry a very long time ago if I’m honest, because of the power or at least the transformative power stories have had on my life, that I know that change is possible. Cause even the way that I think and the way that I live and the way that I interact with people has changed. If I didn't think that was possible, I would have done that psychology degree at- what’re you talking about, plays? I only see plays at panto. Do you know what I mean like I would not be in this world if I didn't think change was possible.

Debbie Hannan:

I think that is probably the perfect note to end on. Thank you so much, Matilda. You've been an incredible first guest.

Matilda Ibini:

Thank you for having me!

Debbie Hannan:

And thank you for sharing your vision of the world. Long may it shape into the version that you see because it's a glorious thing.

Matilda Ibini:

Thank you.

Thank you for listening to my conversation with the brilliant Matilda Ibini, please tune into our second episode where I'll be speaking to international playwright, Abhishek Majumdar about being someone who's work usually travels the world but has come to a bit of a standstill in the era of COVID-19. The music for this podcast was composed by Patricia Panther with sound design by Richard Bell. And I've been your host. Debbie Hannan, please do check out traverse.co.uk to see our upcoming work in Trav Three. Our online venue we traverse is funded by creative Scotland and the City of Edinburgh council with additional support from the Scottish government and performing arts venue relief fund. Traverse Theatre Scotland limited is a registered charity. Number SC 002368.