[♫ Dreamlike electronic music throughout the following]

Mara Menzies:

Certainly in lockdown, I've been getting increasing bouts of insomnia, really interrupted sleep. I know that I dream through those periods because I have the sensation that I'm dreaming, but I haven't remembered very many of those dreams.

Tawona Sitholé:

If you wake up gently, you kind of remember more. It always feels like when you're abruptly woken up, something really nice was about to happen.

Mark Thomas:

I think there were several changes about dreams occurring during lockdown. They're far more vivid. There's a lot more going on.

Kirstin Innes:

What I have noticed since this last lockdown... There are a lot of characters that I'm interacting with throughout the course of any dream. A lot of people.

Mark Thomas:

Recently, they've just been about being with people, hanging out together. All sorts of situations, crowds of people in a gig people, people in a theatre.

Kirstin Innes:

My brain is kind of reaching around from years back, from people I hadn't seen in a long time. My old colleagues and school friends are making appearances.

Mark Thomas:

I dreamt about my old friend, Peter Hirst. I was meeting up with him, but at a miner's strike demo. So masses of people.

Kirstin Innes:

My world has got so much smaller and my dreamscape seems to have got so much larger. I think I'm just missing being around people.

Mark Thomas:

A lot of the dreams are also about that failure to touch crowds, failure to connect.

Peter Geoghegan:

Thinking about being in spaces with lots of people really does feel like a dream, rather than a kind of reflection of some reality.

Kirstin Innes:

I live in a small village now, the occasions that I've been in crowded places since the pandemic started, I've felt very anxious, but not in my dreams. My dreams are obviously missing that kind of human connection.

Peter Geoghegan:

I spent the first few months of the pandemic, actually five months, back in my hometown of Longford in the middle of Ireland. It's not a particularly big town. It wasn't a huge amount of people. So a lot of my dreams did involve people and being around people and that kind of nervousness, because I think I felt quite away from the world, and I wasn't really sure what the rest of the world was doing.

Isobel McArthur:

There's a type of dream characterised by feelings that I think this situation has turned the volume up on a wee bit. Like a sense of threat, a fearfulness, a loneliness. Cravings for things, experiences you weren't able to have. And then often my brain will quite lazily reach for what is also just going on that week in the flat or whatever. And you like smash the two things together [laughs]

Peter Geoghegan:

I would find myself incorporating my everyday life into my dream, which I find quite dull as well. Because my everyday life is dull enough. So it's quite dull to have dreams that involve your everyday life.

Mark Thomas:

Do you know the actual, the stuff that's happening in real life is dull, but the processing of actually all the fears that accompany it and the anxiety is intense and the dreams are way better than the lived experience.

Isobel McArthur:

This sensory deprivation that is such a big part of our experience at the moment, is your subconscious almost chooses actively to defy it and says that thing you can't have, have it now. Those are really, really gorgeous moments, I think.

Cathy Forde:

Do you ever have dreams like when you meet one of your idols, let's say like, I don't know, Elvis Presley, and you become their friend and then you're being normal with them?

Mark Thomas:

In the dream, there is a doctor's station where you could do a sort of walk-in check up. And I walked in and just go, look, I'm really anxious. I'm concerned about everything. And there was a man all bandaged up and he was being attended to by other people. And I remember thinking that's David Bowie in there. And then the man mumbled something. Now I don't say anything, but the man mumbled something and the doctor goes over there and then comes back and said, Mr. Bowie would like to say hello, Mr. Thomas.

Cathy Forde:

And we end up just chatting normally about coffee or something.

Mark Thomas:

I mean, I met David Bowie! That's not bad, is it? And he recognised me [laughs].

Uma Nada-Rajah:

When you're having a dream, everything changes. You're immersed in one situation. And it's almost like the situation has changed. The characters and people, everyone else except you seems to know that everything else has changed. That's probably quite reflective of a sensibility that we all have right now, where the world is just changing incredibly rapidly. The pace of the news cycle has changed so dramatically. I wonder if that's similar, that's seeped into your subconscious. All of a sudden you're like what am I doing now? I have no idea, I'll just go along with it. [Laughs].

Mark Thomas:

So then I'm off to Newcastle. There's been trains, a lot of trains in the dream. Travel. Because I can't. I get to Newcastle and I'm waiting waiting waiting waiting waiting at the platform, just chatting. And I'm talking to some old mates of mine, who I used to go to college with and they're going, aren't you gonna be late? So that's when I go to the theatre. It's an old music hall theatre, and it shut for redecorating. This version of the Newcastle theatre isn't there, it doesn't exist in reality. My friend Kevin Day, who's one of the first performers I worked with, and Shazia Mirza who's one of my favourite performers. And we're just sort of sitting there in this gallery, just going, when are the audience going to turn up? They're never going to come back.

Isobel McArthur:

I'm sat in the auditorium with a gin and tonic and settling in, having looked through the programme, and everybody's kind of looking forward to an evening at the theatre and then someone comes and taps you on the shoulder and says, 'what are you doing out here? You're in the show.' Oh! And I don't question that, I assume this must be correct and get taken backstage. And I'm trying to ask as many questions as I possibly can about this show and what's going on and who I play in it, without seeming like, I don't absolutely know what I'm doing. And they'll say, 'well, it's you, you obviously are playing the lead. We've all been rehearsing for nine years. And we assumed you were also doing that on your own time. You are ready aren't you?’ And I don't know the lines, I don't know the play, I don't know what's going on. I know I need to go on. There's the pressure of delivering the performance. And you say, erm, what is the play? 'What? It's Hamlet!' And I'll just try and improvise it. And I'm thinking to myself, are there ways to secrete bits of the text onto the stage, hidden in props, written on myself? Ah, could we postpone for another night? And they're like 'the whole run is sold out. Everyone's paid a thousand pounds a ticket.' And you always go on, you go on, like you walk on and you try and play Hamlet off the cuff. You never go, this is absurd! [Laughs] And that's very much a recurring dream in loads of different guises with the details changed. I had a dream not unlike that last night, another one of these theatre dreams. I believed I was directing a production of Romeo and Juliet, but all of the costumes and the set dressing and everything was for a production of Miss Saigon. So inevitably nothing made any sense.

Peter Geoghegan:

Like in a play where you've got bits of stages and sets from previous productions, the places of my past provide easy backdrops for my dreams. So recently I dreamt I was at the leadership contest for Irish political party the Fianna Fáil, an old Irish political party. And it was all taking place in the ballroom of the Longford Arms. I've never been to a Fianna Fáil party conference, but they're unlikely to have their leadership contests in the ballroom of the local hotel in Longford. Somehow I'd been parachuted in to this contest, I was covering it as a journalist - and by parachuted, I mean I arrived on a parachute, and I actually hit the compère when I landed, the man who was kind of announcing who the winner of the Fianna Fáil leadership was going to be. I managed to land on top of it. And I found myself saying, what am I doing here? You know, I had a microphone and I was supposed to interview people. Well I also had a personal interest because a friend, who I'd not seen in many years, his father was running for the leader. And it was quite surreal, it was one of the more surreal dreams. I had elements of, lots of my own, my work life, my personal life, the experiences that I'd had as a child... but all kind of brought into this strange setting. It was a kind of this ballroom where I've been many times when I was younger. And I woke from that missing many things, actually. Missing my own, wondering about my friend, but also actually missing that part of my own daily life, which used to involve doing things like taking your microphone and going to rooms that were filled with people.

Mark Thomas:

I wonder if collectively we're all experiencing, we're all having to go through the processing of what is actually quite a traumatic time. It's a traumatic time in the fear that we have of people close to us. The fear we have of strangers, the fear that we have of people known, the fear that we have of work, of jobs, of, you know, of collapsing and imminent doom. But also because of the simple thing that actually we're not connecting with other human beings in a way that is normal. And that normal way of connecting with human beings is a profound thing. It's a profound thing to touch another human being.

Isobel McArthur:

My most exciting dreams during the lockdown were about physical contact, unfettered, physical contact for as long as you wanted it with another human being.

Mark Thomas:

And that's a profound thing, to want to be in physical contact. So what I think we're generating is this enormous library of dreams where we're trying to process what we're doing, but also to reach out and experience things that we're not having on a day to day life.

MJ McCarthy:

Thank you for listening to The Dream Frequencies episode two. Contributors to this episode were, in order of appearance: Mara Menzies, Tawona Sitholé, Mark Thomas, Kirstin Innes, Peter Geoghegan, Isobel McArthur, Cathy Forde and Uma Nada-Rajah. The Dream Frequencies is part of the Creative Community, Irish Theatre in Scotland series, a Traverse Theatre partnership with the Consulate General of Ireland Edinburgh. The Traverse is a registered Scottish charity number SC002368, and is funded by Creative Scotland and the City of Edinburgh Council, with additional support from the Scottish Government Performing Arts Venue Relief Fund.