[♫ Dreamlike electronic music throughout the following]

Mark Thomas:

Now I think generally speaking, my dreams have gone from Salvador Dali to Hieronymus Bosch. Whimsical floppy giraffe, to full-on mouse demon.

Peter Geoghegan:

I'm definitely aware of waking almost every day with some quite vivid sensation, vivid image, as much as anything. You know, fragments, bits of images that kind of stick, and I think the stickiness of those fragments feels like it's increased during the pandemic. You wake with a kind of penumbra of last night's sleep and the last night's dream kind of imprinted in your consciousness, maybe in a way that I might not have been as aware of, or might not have felt as, as strong as it does now.

Uma Nada-Rajah:

I've been on night shift. I was on night shift last week. When it's your third or fourth night shift in a row, you've like lost the will to live by five in the morning. I was dozing off and I had, you know one of those dozy dreams. The nights in a hospital can be quite cinematic, cause the lights are always crap. And it's you and the patient in this eerie ward where there's like, you know, tumbleweeds going down the corridor and stuff. I sat down with a patient. I was like, there's something in my ear. Oh, you've got octopus ear, just take it out. I removed an octopus from her ear. Just like slowly. Oh, don't worry, there's quite a lot of it. It's like three times the size of your head. That's fine. You have this like, kind of quite creamy, quite gelatinous beast, just emerged out of your ear. And it was like the exact same layout of the actual ward. So you like wake up and you're like, okay, don't write that in the notes. Cause that didn't happen. 'Removed octopus, sterile procedures in use' [laughs].

Isobel McArthur:

I got the coronavirus in March of last year. It took me out of action for over a month. And whilst I was ill with it, I did need to sleep about 20 hours a day. I slept an odd sleep. The vast majority of my dreams were about just my kind of corporeal existence on one level or another, and physical sensations. Your taste is replaced by one taste, which you experience all the time. So everything tastes of that one thing, regardless, and whether you're eating something or drinking something or not, you have this taste and it is a metallic taste, a nauseating taste. It just felt like it was everywhere because it was so constant. And I would lie in bed, tasting it, falling asleep, tasting it. And then my dreams felt like there was something in my mouth, in my system, that was really creating this disgusting taste. So a lot of my dreams were about having something awful in my mouth, like, you know, rotting flesh or something terrible. Knowing as well that you have this illness, the speculation as to how it started, because this is back in March, we were having all kinds of speculative conversations in terms of, you know, the average member of the public. I did have a lot of dreams that I was turning into a bat. There is that dimension to the coronavirus origin, almost as if, almost as if I had ingested a bat or swallowed one. You know, like those things they tell you when you're a kid, you eat your watermelon seed and then it'll just start to grow within you, start growing out your mouth. It was like that. It was like, I was, I was going to turn into something from the inside out, because I was so aware of this awful taste. Like I had ingested something.

Kirstin Innes:

And then there were a lot of people involved in this vampire situation. We all seemed to be in what I think might've been some sort of big youth hostel dorm room with big bunk beds. This youth hostel was also possibly, some of it was also a vampire castle. I remember looking at the vampire's son and thinking he must be about 500 years old, but he's disguised himself as a very, very, very boring 21st century misogynist bloke with terrible shoes [laughs]. There's a little girl who's friends with my eldest son, who was there, and she was being quite cheeky to the vampires, and I was kind of admiring that but also thinking, I think I probably need to keep her away from these vampires. They weren't immediately terrifying vampires, but there was something going on. This is probably a bit pandemic now I think about it, isn't it! [Laughs].

Mara Menzies:

My favorite tree is the baobab tree. Growing up, it was very present in a lot of stories. And also its size, it's just this huge, immense, incredible tree, that is so full of life and time. I was in my house in Edinburgh. And then I noticed that there was a branch outside the window and it was this baobab tree. And then suddenly there was no window. And then there was no house around me. I was just by the tree. I was in the middle of this space - like a forest, but maybe not because the trees were too far apart, and this baobab tree was on its own. And then I noticed there was this tiny little seedling, right by the base of this baobab tree. And because I felt that there weren't enough trees around, I took care of it and I watered it. And then suddenly this little seedling began to grow bigger, and it began to kind of wrap itself around the baobab. It was getting taller and taller. And this baobab was a huge tree. But this other seedling that I had watered began to kind of crush it almost. It was as if I could hear the sounds of this baobab tree being crushed and squeezed. And then I was trying to sort of tear this other tree off it, to give it space and allow it to breathe or to live again. And as I was trying to sort of tear it off, my fingers were, they were bleeding and I was putting scratch marks onto the baobab as I was trying to sort of prize this other tree off. And there was nothing that I could do about it. I think that's just when it ended, there was no resolution to it. And maybe I think the panic really made me remember it.

Peter Geoghegan:

When you have a dream that hasn't resolved or you've had a dream that's brought up characters from your life that you've got unresolved issues with, or kind of questions over, that will definitely overhang into the next day, feeding into the kind of wider sense of unease that happens when you're a year into a pandemic.

Cathy Forde:

I dreamt there was an evil presence in the room with me, a demon or something had come into the bedroom and I was lying in my actual bed. So it was coming through the door. It wasn't a fully formed figure, and it came into the bedroom and it put its arms or its hands on either side of me and pinned me to the bed, pinned me down to the bed. I was absolutely terrified and it was going to do something awful to me. You know that way, I was forcing my neck to stretch because my arms were pinned and I woke up shouting and I was really frightened by that dream. It was horrible!

MJ McCarthy:

For what it's worth, Cathy, that really reminds me of episodes of sleep paralysis that I've experienced.

Cathy Forde:

Really?

MJ McCarthy:

You'll maybe hear it in time, but Isobel describes something incredibly similar as well.

Isobel McArthur:

Sleep paralysis, if folk don't know, is essentially when your brain has managed to wake up, but your entire body is still asleep. So you are aware of your surroundings, yourself, your real actual reality in the bed you're in, in the actual room you're in, but you cannot speak or move. And so it feels as if you're locked into your body. It is one of the oddest sleep phenomena I've ever, ever experienced. One of the things that tends to characterise sleep paralysis is there is a sense of a threat in the room.

MJ McCarthy:

And a defining feature is that a presence comes to your room and either sits on your chest or pins you down in some fashion.

Cathy Forde:

Oh my goodness! [gasps, then laughs].

Isobel McArthur:

You get all these kinds of interesting references to it throughout literature, and bits of art history.

MJ McCarthy:

And it's where the historical myth of both the incubus and the succubus come from.

Cathy Forde:

So that's a phenomenon that other people have similar manifestations of that experience?

MJ McCarthy:

And a lot of the time, but not always, but a lot of the time it can be attributed to stress. Stress can be a kind of a catalyst for that kind of disordered sleep.

Peter Geoghegan:

I think you know in the past, in the pre-pandemic era, where you'd wake up and you'd be able to go, oh no, everything's okay. You know, you wake up, you're in your bed. Things are okay, go back to sleep. Now you wake up and there's always a sense in your head that everything isn't okay, because it's not okay.

Tawona Sitholé:

There is something more to the human spirit that we maybe are not aware of, because of our menial tasks of getting by, you know, solving problems, that meet our sort of basic needs. I love this line I had before that, you know, we're just spiritual beings having a human experience [laughs]. Humans are not one dimensional by any means, dreams give us an opportunity for our imagination to just express itself more. So there's something about that that I think is quite important. So nature, being in nature, out of the built up space, that is very energising for me. So yeah, that comes a lot in my dreams. Mountains mean a lot to me, there's a proverb, a very kind of popular proverb, that says [speaks in another language], you can climb a mountain in a straight line [laughs]. You have to negotiate, you have to go back when sometimes you have to go up to go down, down to go up, and it's like a metaphor for our journeys, whatever it might be, maybe for the whole life journey or an undertaking that you have. For me, particularly, I'm fascinated by the fact that when you're next to the mountain, you can't see it. You have to be a long distance to be able to see it. In my mountain dreams, I would say 20% of the time I am on them. But most of the time I am seeing them from a distance. Even though I'm far away, I can see small detail on the mountain. So sometimes there are some animals walking on there. I had that recently, there was a wildebeest walking, and they generally don't go on mountains, so that's the dream part for you [laughs]. But yeah, I could see the wildebeest, their kind of grace, really healthy and walking. And yeah, as I was saying to you, those dreams when I wake up, I feel very energised. Like, yeah, there was something about it that, yeah, I just feel I wake up with a really good energy.

Peter Geoghegan:

I'm definitely aware of waking almost every day with some quite vivid sensation.

Mark Thomas:

The move from sleep to consciousness can have various gradations.

Peter Geoghegan:

I often feel there's like a gossamer link almost, this thin, diaphanous link when I wake up, between my dreaming state and my new waking state.

Mark Thomas:

To the extent where I can wake and regret a dream.

Peter Geoghegan:

And within which the echoes, these kind of fragments of dreams, kind of percolate through.

Mark Thomas:

My dream has got red pen all over it.

Peter Geoghegan:

And what I'm left with more is a kind of sensation, a sensation of sometimes fear, sometimes interest, sometimes intrigue, sometimes excitement. And that's almost where my dreaming space kind of exists after I've woken. And I feel like that's become more pronounced during the pandemic.

Mark Thomas:

And then suddenly you go, oh, I'm awake.

[♫ Music slowly changes into the sound of bird song, which fades away]

MJ McCarthy:

Thank you so much for listening to the third and final episode of The Dream Frequencies. Contributors to this episode were, in order of appearance: Mark Thomas, Peter Geoghegan, Uma Nada-Rajah, Isobel McArthur, Kirstin Innes, Mara Menzies, Cathy Forde and **Tawona Sitholé**. 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.