

Tiffany Knight, Nescha Jelk, Fleur Kilpatrick, Kirste Vandergiesen, and Sarah Peters

The Artist's Archive:

The Traces of Independent and Community Theatre

This is an edited transcript of a recorded online conversation from June 2024. Tiffany Knight, Nescha Jelk, Fleur Kilpatrick and Sarah Peters were on Kaurana land in Adelaide, and Kirste Vandergiesen was on Erawirung country in the Riverland.

Tiffany Knight: It's great to see all of you again, thank you so much for your time. If you cast your mind back to the conversation we had at the ADSA conference last year, we were talking about artists, absences and archives. I thought we could start with Fleur about Riverland Youth Theatre and what a pivotal role it serves in your community. Could you start by giving us a condensed history of RYT and how it has developed under your direction?

Fleur Kilpatrick: RYT started in 1985. There's a bunch of theatre companies and arts organisations that have a fortieth birthday coming up, and ours is next year. You can definitely time when Don Dunstan was around based on when all the anniversaries are happening. RYT started in Barmera as something to give the unemployed youth something to do, if you read the articles from the time. So, it was very much about keeping youth off the street and busy, and it has evolved in that time. Regional companies and companies that have always had a very small staff, they do ebb and flow, and they go through a lot of changes because when you have a small staff, they become based on the personality of the one person that is running it. I was speaking with a young person yesterday who was like, "oh, the moment when Celeste Cody arrived. Like, what, a big moment that was. And then when she left, and everything fell in a heap". And then someone else comes along that it rises again, and then it falls in a heap again and it was definitely in a bit of a heap when I rocked up. It had dwindled to a very small organisation of just 1.4 people, and it had about four kids a week, two on the weeks that two of them were with a different parent. And now we have classes almost every night of the week some nights, two classes. At the moment, Mondays we have preschool music and movement, Monday night, there's something, isn't there, Kirste?

Kirste Vandergiesen: I started Dungeons & Dragons now, so we've got six kids coming into Dungeons & Dragon's sessions on Monday, yeah.

FK: Tuesday night is Teen ensemble. Wednesdays there is an online class this term that is visual art and there is also a grown-ups art class and a tweens art class on alternating weeks. Thursdays there is Third Place, which is like a chill hangout. Fridays, there's Alternative Club, which is like a music group and they're designing T-shirts and band T-shirts and writing songs. And Sunday there's an Aboriginal youth group, so a huge variety of stuff as well as ongoing major projects.

I've been thinking a lot about that idea of, you know, the one personality driving it, because I am at the moment on maternity leave, so right now feels like a wonderful chance to be testing out if I've done my job well in the last three years to get RYT to a place where it doesn't all fall in a heap if someone steps away for six months or changes and it's been so beautiful to see that at the moment it is just thriving in my absence. Sam Wannan has taken over from me and is working closely with Kirste and with Alysha Herrmann, and they're doing such different, cool, beautiful things. And also, Sam has a bunch of skills that I don't have and like they've just got an Employee Assistance Program happening— all these amazing things happening in my absence. So yeah, the company is in a lovely place that is not solely dependent on one person's existence and personality right now, which is great.

TK: That's amazing and sounds so holistic. It's called Riverland Youth Theatre, but it sounds like it's the creative arts in general.

FK: Yes, the name's bad. We're working on changing it. Kirste has a big list of names going in the office at the moment.

TK: That's exciting. The focus on the community that you've got in the Riverland is not dissimilar to what ActNow does in the city and for diverse groups as well. Nescha, could you tell us a little bit about your involvement in ActNow, its history and how it's shaped under Yasmin's leadership as well?

Nescha Jelk: ActNow Theatre was started in 2007 by Edwin Attrill, who was seventeen at the time. Edwin and two other teenagers that he knew through Urban Myth, (which was a youth arts company in Adelaide which is no longer), and then also some young people that are involved with Amnesty International, were really keen to do a work about David Hicks, who was in Guantanamo Bay at the time. And the big impetus was to do political works out in public, in public spaces and that's the kind of cornerstone of ActNow. Then Edwin started moving into a really keen interest into using Forum theatre to create social justice theatre. I think the first work was *Expect Respect* and that was sort of equipping — going to schools and workplaces and equipping people with more knowledge on LGBTQIA rights and strategies, you know if there are people who witness or experience homophobia, things that you can say to be an ally or to hold your power.

Over the time the company has evolved, so there's kind of three main streams. One is social justice theatre, particularly since Yasmin Gurrreeboo started in the company as an associate artist and being a woman of colour, she was really keen to create and alongside Edwin wanted to make anti-racism, social justice, forum theatre works. There was a work called *Responding to Racism*, which has now been shapeshifting over time, and it's now under the banner of *Let's Do Better Together: Tackling Racism*, under that title. And then alongside that, that's one stream is social justice theatre and making theatre for young people as well. So, this beautiful work called *Like Me, Like You* is an anti-racism work, that's teaching young people to celebrate our cultural differences and to also just embrace and really see where our similarities are as well. And then also there's a current work in development, *Josh and Sophia Don't Play Together Anymore*, which is a work around emotional literacy in primary school age kids and understanding healthy relationships and understanding healthy roles — different roles of gender. Breaking down the idea of men having to be sort of tough and, you know, dealing with their feelings of aggression and things like that. So, the idea of that work (and it's been made in consultation with White Ribbon, who's been running consultation in Zahra Foundation and Relationships Australia, South Australia), is that it's looking at really early prevention around issues that can lead to domestic violence.

Then in our vision to democratise and to decolonise storytelling, we're also looking at supporting our First Nations, CALD, POC, and LGBTQIA and Disabled communities. So that's through our artist development programmes, so we have residencies and our cultural leaders programme, series of masterclasses on building cultural leadership and then we have our more grassroots community artists and cultural development sector where we have free workshops for community members. Like career pathway programmes. So our First Nations arts pathway programme or at the moment we've got AFTRS, the Australian Film, Television, Radio School, working with them on an introduction to film making course which has been really lovely. So it's really a kind of a broad spectrum but it all kind of sits under that frame of making and using art to make the world a better place.

Sarah Peters: It's such a clear parallel, I feel like "how can we make life go well for people?" seems to be such a common thread between ActNow and the work of RYT, and arts making life go well or better with arts, it's lovely.

NJ: Yeah. Well, that was kind of a shift that we've made recently. We used to have our tackling works. *Tackling Racism*. But we're kind of doing some rebranding around the sort of *Let's Do Better Together* idea where we're welcoming people into kind of making positive change as opposed to having people feel like they are being alienated or judged or things like that. But we're all in this together and we can all do good.

TK: Brilliant. And what's your role now at ActNow Nescha.

NJ: I'm associate director at ActNow, so I'm looking after the artist development programmes and then also our most grass roots community engagement. So things like our community, intersectional community workshops that we have and things like that.

Then Monique Hapgood is the other associate director who is looking after our repertoire works.

TK: Amazing. So much work that both companies are doing, and it makes me realise how many hats you all have to wear at the same time. How do you factor in archiving into your workflow? It'd be really interesting to hear how you embed archiving into your workflow through this process.

FK: Archiving and how we document has been a really interesting question for me for a number of years with this company. I'm really aware that we are a physical distance away from everyone else and I wonder "how do we tell this story?". We're also in a poor region if we are going to do any fundraising, it's not going to happen locally. There's a necessity to be able to tell our story to people who are not physically present, and we very seldom have people come to visit. We've had one person from a funding body come and spend two days solidly just observing us and that was just wonderful. And she's since moved on from that organisation, but she was such an incredible advocate for what we did and that was actually a health funding body. And so, she was able to talk really directly to health people about the difference that an arts org could make because she saw us in action. Not everyone is going to do that so how do you tell those stories and how do we tell them in a way that isn't just in our acquittals?

We're really interested in getting the voices of our young people into those stories, in making archiving be as creative as we are. Something that we've tried to do with our annual reports, for instance, is to document the ways that the community express gratitude that isn't a list of donations. Last year we had a page that included things like all the pumpkins that were brought in and the eggs and the fruit and the time that someone took my car and returned it cleaned and all the different little thank you's, all the babies that were held that have been brought in to meet us, things like that, the hugs. It's hard to document in a way, the ephemera of it all. I know one story that this person from Regional Health Innovation Fund kept talking about was the moment that this kiddo, this nine-year-old, just trotted in in the middle of a meeting and was like "Hey, I want to use the swings are the swings up?" And just came and ate all the snacks from the snack basket and complained that the swings weren't up that day and just, you know, took over the meeting and she was like, "this is incredible. This doesn't happen in a health space that a kid just walks in and takes over the meeting in this way". So, seeing the ownership that the young people have of our space is a really interesting thing that is hard to document. So that's when I approached Sarah and Tully about Kirste's role. Kirste started with us as an administrator but is also an incredible writer and illustrator and it felt like, it felt negligent to not use her in other, more creative ways as well. And Kirste is like freaking great, like loves a spreadsheet, loves some order, loves making the place more organised, but also then is this incredible creative force.

And so, we were really fortunate enough to receive a little bit of money to test out this idea and make Kirste, a writer in residence, one day a week and I will hand over to Kirste to tell you what she has done with that one day a week.

TK: Fantastic.

KV: Yeah, that one day a week it happened for a long time, and then it stopped happening. I won't lie. Writing is hard work. Yes, I think we can mostly all agree on that. So, when I was doing the one day a week, I was finding ways to delegate those hours to going to classes because as an admin person I have to do admin work. I can't just take two hours off to watch this class happen. So I was using those residency hours to observe and listen to what the teens were saying and what they were doing and their experiences, because it's so much more than just watching them do drama activities. It's the conversations that they're having with each other and with Fleur and eventually with me as well.

And then I started writing all those things down and in a very natural way it became this huge blog that I've called *Wayfinder*. And it was essentially just a weekly update of this blog where I would document all the weird, joyful, crazy stuff that happens in the office. And I thought I would run out of content eventually, but I didn't because it just gets weirder and weirder every week. So, part of why I decided to do it that way was actually, I was taking inspiration from Fleur in a way. Fleur's really good at writing very transparent and genuine Facebook posts about RYT and the experiences that we have there without sugar-coating it, you know, to appease the greater gods that fund us and what have you.

TK: That sounds fascinating. And what's happened with *Wayfinder*? As an archival source, have you embedded that in grant applications, do funding bodies know about this?

KV: So interestingly enough, we've just submitted our annual reporting, and they asked for evaluation outcomes and me and Sam were just like, "ah dunno", so we put the link to *Wayfinder* in there. I don't know if they're gonna read that or not, but it's the only thing that we put in our evaluation outcomes. I'm kind of hoping that they do. We've also used it – we've got a work experience kid in at the moment, and she had no idea what RYT was about. So, on her first day, we got her to read through *Wayfinder* and she's got a better idea of what we do here.

FK: Sam read it before he came to take over from me. Sam, who's covering my job. He was reading it to get a sense of what this company does on a weekly basis as well. So it's pretty cool. Sam came in with such a good sense of who we were and who the community was. He didn't need an induction. And I think that's in large part due to *Wayfinder*.

KV: And there's still huge discussions around it too, because I've still got hours left in the bank to use for it, but I wanted to use it in a really specific way and not just writing blogs. So, we're thinking about condensing it down into a booklet and sending it out to people when we do our fortieth birthday party, having it for people there. We're thinking about other ways we can spread *Wayfinder* out to the community, so people know what we do here.

TK: It's so exciting. You think of archives as something that are locked away, and it's only the academics that go to read them. But to think of an archive as a living document, an interactive document, is a really novel approach. And I have no doubt that funding bodies would be absolutely refreshed to look at something like that instead of spreadsheets.

SP: One of the beautiful things that Kirste has done with Wayfinder is that she's captured that vulnerability and transparency that you first saw in Fleur's writing really beautifully. And it is a live, living, breathing archive. Every time it is posted anybody can read it; anybody can go and have a look and see what has been going on at RYT. And so, it exists in the now. It's not just as something that is held off for later. Which no doubt has other challenges associated with it, but it's a very present thing which is interesting.

FK: I think something that can be difficult for companies like both of ours is that the goal post is different to a lot of other companies. For a lot of companies, the goal post if you're in youth arts is like "make the next generation of theatre makers", or if you're in some companies, it's to "make the best production" and we are very much process over product. We are very much the relationship is the project, and sometimes perhaps the best outcome that we can point to is one of our young people. Is to be like "look at that one, they're still here". You know "they are here, and they are achieving, and they are frankly alive, and they have a community because of what we are doing" and that's different to pointing to a production or to photos of a production.

One of the best living archives of RYT, for instance, is Alysha Herrmann, who first came to the company twenty years ago as a teen Mum to be involved in a project called *Random Girls*. And you can point to her and say "this is the legacy of a production twenty years ago". Next year will be the twentieth anniversary. It's this artist and the impact that then she has gone on to have in the arts industry and in country arts and in youth arts because of a production that got the right funding and the right care and took the right time with a teenage mum Domestic Violence survivor nineteen or twenty years ago. They are the living archive of and living documentation of the worth of what a company like this does as well.

TK: That's an excellent point. And I would say that ActNow would have similar stories. People who have been embedded with that company and we've seen them change the landscape here too. How does ActNow manage archiving and how does it figure into the operations and philosophy there, Nescha?

NJ: It's a challenge because similar to RYT, a lot of our work is invisible to the general public. Most of our performances are in schools or they're in workplaces or other community spaces except for, you know, the odd sort of Dream Big (Adelaide's Children's Festival) production that we've done. And then alongside that you know our residency programmes and the Arts Pathway Program or the community workshops we do, they're not out in the public, so to speak. So it's a constant conversation in the office of like, "how do we really communicate and convey what we do and the impact of what we do?". And evaluation is a big part of that, you know, how do we capture it? From

getting testimonials from community artists that have engaged with us or surveys or other things like that.

It's so wonderful hearing about Wayfinder and using that as a relational tool. It's really cool because that's something we talk about a lot as well particularly around strategic planning and putting numbers to things with targets and KPIs and there's certain things that you can't really do that with. You know, how do you measure with a KPI whether a participants reported an increase in confidence in the certain area, a number is so amorphous compared to the actual impact of what that means. For us, every project that we do, we're kind of having to put in videography and photography, just trying to capture what we're doing to make sure that we can communicate that and show you the experience of that in some way. But I think what RYT is doing sounds really beautiful with the Wayfinder blog and kudos to you guys for that.

TK: Nescha, I want to acknowledge what a central figure you have been and are in the South Australian Theatre community, working first as a Flinders graduate, then artistic associate at State Theatre Company, and your work at the Opera and Adelaide Festival, and particularly as one of the founding members of Rumpus. You and Yasmin Gurreeboo and Bec Mayo, as really the inceptors of that company. It's a big deal. We're going for a big farewell walk on Sunday to say goodbye to Rumpus, and there's lots of feelings around that.

Could you talk a little bit about the process of creating Rumpus? I'm thinking back to the ADSA conference, we saw a wonderful presentation about the collective Betty Can Jump and I sat there at that presentation hearing about how that company started as a collective and all the struggles and issues and navigations to work in a collective format and I just kept thinking about Rumpus the whole time. And what an amazing experience it was to be a part of that. Could you talk about how Rumpus evolved and what's going to happen now in terms of archiving that experience and that organisation?

NJ: My mind goes back to our very first meeting that Yasmin and Rebecca Mayo and I held and invited members of the independent arts community to join. And there's a document which I have to find too, speaking of archiving, where it was mostly minutes, but I just wrote everything that everyone was saying. So, it's kind of a bit of a script of sorts, but I just remember reading back through it a few years ago and I think it was just a really beautiful document showing where things were at then and all of the beautiful intention behind Rumpus and coming from a real place of going "we feel there's this huge gap in our industry in our hometown and you know if we can just band together, hopefully we can make some change". I feel really proud of everything that we achieved. It was I think a year and a day after that meeting that we got the keys to our venue with Australia Council funding to be able to support independent artists that put on shows.

The fact that it all happened through COVID as well. We had one COVID free year and then our second year was in the depths of COVID, and there's all the struggles that come with a collective and, depending on a lot of volunteer hours. It wouldn't have been possible, and it was always meant as a sort of short-term way of operating until we could

get some more funding support to be able to employ people, but that just never happened, unfortunately. So, we had to call it quits.

So many companies came out of Rumpus. Before Rumpus, Adelaide College of the Arts grads and Flinders grads would never talk to each other. And then suddenly we had these companies coming up, which were these collaborations between graduates from those two schools and some of those companies are continuing now. It's lovely. I suppose it was interesting over the course of the years to observe the experience of the people coming into Rumpus and knowing what it was like without Rumpus and the sort of urge behind that. And then you'd have the new graduates that would come into Rumpus and to them, Rumpus just is here. You know, it's kind of always, always been and they don't have much sense of before. And now we're in that time where people will forget about Rumpus. There will be people with the memory of it, but you know, it's interesting talking to new graduates, maybe some of them went to see a Rumpus show, but for a lot of them they don't know what that time was like.

I hope that there's another group of artists one day that tries to start another similar initiative in the future. I think that was the big challenge for us and as volunteers as well, you know, how do you communicate the impact? As opposed to just the numbers, but in terms of 'this is the stuff that we've done' and comparing it to what there was before. The changed sense of community that came out of that place and collaboration and just kind of hope in the industry. And you know in my mind the industry feels far more pessimistic now, I suppose. There's a lot more people that I know that are leaving the industry and going into other careers.

TK: This Sunday is a farewell promenade. Can you tell us what that is?

NJ: In kind of true Rumpus style, like our first party that we had to open the venue, and the company was a house-warming party. The housewarming party theme meant people brought in gifts of op-shop knickknacks or things they had around their home they didn't want anymore. And so we're ending with a funeral. So we're going to meet outside The Gov in Hindmarsh and we're gonna have a bit of a walk. We haven't really planned anything so we're just gonna walk to Rumpus and share some memories of the space outside the building because we haven't got keys anymore.

We wanted to kind of have fun with it. You know, just say goodbye to it but in a playful way. In the spirit of all being artists and everything that we did, you know, everything was a bit tongue in cheek.

FK: That makes me think of The Pram Factory, which was a Melbourne collective from 1970 to 81 and I still felt the shadow of that by the time I was training, you know, there's like degrees of Kevin Bacon, the six degrees of Kevin Bacon. I feel like that about The Pram Factory. Like how many steps removed are you from The Pram Factory? Well, I was taught by people from The Pram Factory so I'm one step removed. But my students were two steps removed. I feel like there's a web you could do like that of Rumpus, and you know South Australian arts and the degrees from Rumpus, and you will still be, you

know, seeing that web in twenty years' time, even though it was such a short period of time that it existed. But yeah, the Kevin Bacon Web perhaps is another way to document. But I love that you are in some way memorialising the grief as well. And I think how we document the end of a company, or the changes of this company is incredibly important. La Mama this year has announced that they cannot continue as business as usual. Having failed once again to get Creative Australia funding. And I'm really proud and excited by the way that they are addressing that in a very head on way and not trying to pretend and not trying to scrape by for another year. They're completely pivoting and doing a different thing. Doing a year of reflection of how to make this sustainable in the wake of continued losses of funding. I think it's so crucial to grieve, publicly and pointedly.

NJ: I think there's a whole issue in general around the independent sector. How do we actually measure the inherent value of it? The real need to have a thriving independent sector that then also feeds into the larger companies. Even just the number of Rumpus shows – there's *Symphonie of the bicycle* that's currently on a tour. I think they're in Geelong at the moment and that had its first kicks as a baby play at Rumpus or Emma Beech's *Photo Box* that then went on to being in Adelaide Festival and Britt Plummers *Chameleon* that then toured regionally as well. Like there's a whole kind of echo. All the artists that got their first gigs in Rumpus and then went on to do state theatre or touring around the world with Windmill or things like that. How do we really measure that? I mean it feels hard as well because the whole arts industry is in that kind of struggle of how we show our value. But I feel like the independent sector in particular has even less resources to do that.

FK: We've talked about with RYT at times because some years we have printed a full programme, but often we've printed it before ever knowing if we have funding for things. Do we do it like "tear here if we didn't get this funding", like "remove here" or, a more positive thing of like "you could be the logos at the bottom of this!". I think there's almost value in putting up the programme for what would have been at Rumpus, you know just print the programme of incredible things that will never happen at Rumpus because of that lack of the funding.

TK: It's such a huge absence that Rumpus is going to leave. I just have to say how courageous it was because you knew going into Rumpus that you weren't going to have that space forever. And it just seems so evocative of knowing the ephemeral nature of theatre, like a performance. You also went, "we know that this space isn't ours forever, but we're going to love it wholeheartedly anyway". And I just think if we can acknowledge it here, if nowhere else, that it was such a wholehearted, ambitious thing to do and we're all grateful to you.

You're all artists first and foremost, but now you're working as cultural leaders and facilitators of other people's art. I wonder how you manage that juggle. Is the artist in you absent as you serve these roles, or do you feel like your embodied archive of knowledge as artists can be stored and activated? How do you juggle that?

FK: I am an artist, whether I am literally writing at that moment, literally working on one project that I can point to or not. That made a huge difference for my mental health and for my time management and all those things as well. But you know, I've got an eleven-week-old baby at the moment. I'm currently reading cookbooks because that's as much as I can concentrate on is one recipe with lots of pictures, that's about it. But I still feel like things are percolating in me and art is happening in some way and words are happening in my brain that, maybe in six months' time I'll be like, "oh shit, that's a book" or "that's a play" or "that's a story to get up and tell". So sometimes I don't realise what it is that I'm writing until I've been having a conversation for sort of six, eight, nine months and then go "Oh, the play. I've been writing a play". So, that helps a lot to have that confidence that I'm continuing to art, whether I am mentoring teenagers or having a baby.

I think the play that I've been writing for our teens for the last couple of years, which is an adaptation of *War of the Worlds*, I think that might be the best play I've written. So, the fact that it's written for our teenagers does not change the quality or the pride that I have in the work. The production that we did at the start of the year when I was nine months pregnant of *The Bacchae* was similarly something I'm as proud of as works that have been on with professional actors. It doesn't change the care and love I'm pouring into it. I was pleasantly surprised that the production was also good because had it not been that would have been fun too, you know. It's an achievement if you get Zelda to come to rehearsal. It's an achievement if Annie has a home. Like there are all these other achievements built into the process of making a play with vulnerable young people, that the final outcome happening to be good was a lovely surprise to me and that we even won an award for it. The Youth Award at Adelaide Fringe, which we didn't know existed, so I was asleep when they were given out. But I would have been proud had it been a work that brought together that group of young people twice a week for a term and saw them loved and cared for, and fed and heard, and then a bunch of random shit that no one wanted to watch that's fine too, but we happened to make a good piece of theatre as well, so that was cool.

TK: Congratulations. What about you Nescha? You're a director first and foremost. How do you juggle that? Where does that part of you go? Do you archive it when you're doing this work?

NJ: I've actually got a few different answers, I suppose. On one hand, particularly with Rumpus for example, because a lot of my work in Rumpus wasn't as an artist, I was facilitating, sort of being one of many that were helping to keep the doors open and keep it rolling and keep creating opportunities for independent artists to create work. Rumpus came right off the back of me working at State Theatre Company and seeing how few opportunities there were and every show that I would do, every audition round, I'd be like, "Oh my God, there's so many great artists and there's just not enough roles for everyone!", and there's just not enough shows in a State Theatre season to be hiring all the actors that really should be working.

I suppose it kind of feels like a bit of a cheesy analogy, but it didn't feel like stepping away from being an artist doing that work, but it's more so that I was just fertilising the farmland, so to speak. Rather than doing any kind of farming and, you know, replanting the same crop in soil that's degrading over time, it was me putting back into the soil and the earth and trying to create a healthier sort of biodiversity in our sector. And that then helps me make better work as well.

There's times where I go "I miss just being a director in a rehearsal room", of course, but also there's huge satisfaction that you get from every Rumpus show that I'd go to. I'd just feel so proud sitting in the audience that this could even happen. Just seeing the different collaborations between different artists was so fulfilling and wonderful. And seeing the audiences that we were bringing in, just going, "Oh my God, these are audiences that are under fifty". Like, "where were you my whole career up until this point?", because they definitely weren't around. It was all really fulfilling and satisfying.

From my work at ActNow and also working on *Floods of Fire* in which I had contact with many, many different communities, I'm sure it's the same fulfilment that you get Fleur from seeing people trying something out or creating beautiful work and just having any hand in that is really beautiful. And there is an artistry in how you can facilitate that and support people through that and get people feeling comfortable making and creating. In the same way as a director, when you're getting actors feeling comfortable it's kind of the same thing. It's just on a slightly different scale I suppose. But also, I do love a spreadsheet as well. I mean, every show I've directed, I've made a spreadsheet for it, so it doesn't feel too different.

TK: That's great. That's such good advice to hear both of you speak in that way, just to be reminded that to be an artist is much more than just the actual practise that we sometimes assume it is to be an artist. It's a much bigger thing to have a career in this industry and you both use your artistry to create something bigger than just an individual show, and that's very inspiring.

SP: As a wrapping up question, was there anything that you thought you might say today that we haven't asked about?

NJ: I'll just say one thing with my ActNow hat as a link to archiving. The kind of consultation work that happens, in terms of talking to communities, listening to communities, capturing their desires and their wants and needs. Just capturing that information so that we can then form our programmes around that for them is a part of the archiving. Consultation and just listening to our communities, is a huge part of what ActNow does and is about.

SP: And there's a really lovely sense of taking the temperature of a community as a part of that consultation, I imagine. So then if the work is always reflecting what has come from the community, then the work in a way also becomes a catalogue of what has mattered to people across a period of time. Amazing. Fleur did you have anything else you wanted to add?

FK: I was just thinking as you were sort of giving a similar answer to me, Nescha, about how we're still artists. I was wondering if male theatre directors and playwrights would have a — this is so stereotyped, but I feel like we have very soft interpretations or very malleable interpretations of success and being an artist and what a good career and a worthwhile career looks like. And I feel like sometimes men find that harder, to be that kind with their definitions of success.

I think there's a whole second conversation that could happen with similar questions to this, with some participants of ActNow and some participants of RYT to see the impact of the work from the eyes and mouths of some of these young people as well, it's really interesting. My brain is now also ticking with the idea of creating a cemetery of theatre companies past, and doing tombstones for all these deceased companies or the grant applications that never happened. Maybe there's something like the baby garden in a cemetery for the stillborn babies as well, you get some little tombstones for projects that never even got off the ground.

SP: The memorial for the missing of it all.

FK: Absolutely. I've grieved very publicly about the loss of my role at Monash as well. So, I'm really interested in the grief when these things fall to pieces and how we share that and how we acknowledge that. The loss of a career or the loss of an opportunity or a performance space; these are real losses and real griefs. And even though Rumpus wasn't a person, it is a thing to be mourned. So, there's a really beautiful project in that for Nescha and Sarah and all of us — to think about how we document loss.

KV: It has been a joy to just listen, to be honest. I love listening to artists talk about art things. I was gonna say, if the question was pointed towards me, that the artist is definitely still here, but the work is absent. Like I don't do a lot of writing or drawing these days because work takes a lot of creative energy, actually, and emotional energy. So, by the time I get home, I've not got a lot to put into my creative work, so it's something that Sam and I've talked about a lot. Because I think he feels similarly to me, and we have started doing mandatory art things during our staff meetings.

SP: I love that. Thank you all so much. I really appreciate your time for us, kind of in the absence of a recording of last year, to come together as artists and archive this conversation. Thank you.

TIFFANY KNIGHT is an award-winning actor, director and lecturer in Drama at Flinders University. She has performed with theatre companies across Australia and Canada, including State Theatre Company South Australia, Queensland Theatre, Manitoba Theatre Centre and eight seasons with Bard on the Beach Shakespeare Festival. She received the Vice Chancellor's Prize for Doctoral Thesis Excellence in 2019 and co-authored The Creative PhD: Challenges, Opportunities, Reflections with Professor Tara Brabazon and Natalie Hills in 2020.

NESCHA JELK was the Resident Director for the State Theatre Company of South Australia between 2013-16 before co-founding RUMPUS in 2019, an artist-run venue that supported the creation and presentation of independent theatre by South Australian artists. She was also the Artistic Associate of *Floods of Fire* (Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Adelaide Festival and the University of Adelaide), a large-scale participatory weekend-long event in the 2024 Adelaide Festival. Nescha is Associate Director at ActNow Theatre.

FLEUR KILPATRICK is an awarded-winning playwright, educator and theatre director. She is an associate artist at Riverland Youth Theatre and holds a postgraduate diploma of directing and a Masters in playwriting from the VCAM. Fleur has been making theatre for 18 years and still thinks it is the best of jobs.

KIRSTE VANDERGIESSEN (she/her) is a writer, digital illustrator and producer. Kirste worked with the Ruby Award winning *No Limits: Young Regional Writers* (Writers SA) team and feels strongly about providing support and guidance to young regional creatives. She lives for all things magical and ensures her work reflects that love. Kirste is the administration officer and writer in residence at Riverland Youth Theatre.

SARAH PETERS (she/her) is a Senior Lecturer in Drama at Flinders University and book reviews editor for Australasian Drama Studies. Sarah is a playwright, dramaturg, and theatre practitioner specialising in verbatim theatre and community-engaged theatre making. Her co-authored monograph, *Verbatim Theatre Methodologies for Community-Engaged Practice*, was published with Routledge in 2023.

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