**BACxHoG - Producers**

Transcription

D - Debbie Chan

A - Alan Lane

C - Chantal Williams

Recorded remotely via Squadcast.

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**D -** Hi, I'm Debbie Chan. I'm based in Bolton and I'm an independent producer.

**A -** Hello. My name is Alan Lane. I'm part of a team that runs a thing called Slung Low, which is a theatre company in South Leeds.

**C -** I'm Chantal, I'm a community producer for Common Wealth Theatre based in Cardiff.

**D -** How do you define your role as a producer in terms of supporting artists to be working with communities? It's an interesting question, isn't it, because when I was looking through these actually and trying to reflect, very, particularly given the situation we're all currently in, I guess with a lot of my work, a lot of it is about me and how I work. I will have values. So actually, my values are people who I work with must have the best experience. My, my practise is about people. So when it comes to people, it's about treating them with kindness. If I have time. Caring. Moments of coming together and that's normally around drinking or eating and gathering. So, you know, in terms of my philosophy and bringing people together in collaboration, it is about setting those really comfortable moments where people can come together. That's always my starting point with any project. I don't know about you, Chantal and Alan. I'm one of these people that I'm brought in at very, very different moments in a project. I can be right at the beginning and be in a very luxurious position where I can start with the people. So normally they are groups of younger people generally, and we hang out. But sometimes I'm brought midway. So yeah, but that's how I, you know, when I think about that question, I always start with myself and my, my working practise.

**C -** Yeah, I, I found this question difficult to sort of put into my role, too. And the reason being is that actually I work with communities first, really. So as a community producer, what I do is, is I work with the, I'm predominantly working with the community to identify needs. And I mean, people like to say consult. I don't really like that word. What I like to think about is I build trust and friendships with people and, and that means definitely taking care, like Debbie said, and taking some time to really understand the landscape of place. And sort of the micro influences of a place too. So all those different things that have come together to create a community, a geographical community. Because I work embedded in East Cardiff so all of my work happens in East Cardiff. So it’s really important. I understand the people here and all the different variables and all the different influences that that community faces. And to stand, stand, sorry, stand side by side with them. I live here, so I experience those things too. So I guess when I'm supporting artists. I guess I'm given my own experience, but also all of the lovely relationships that I build and hold all the time. I'm giving that over to them too and maybe acting as a middle person, along with a group of people that I work with called A Sounding Board that I've put together in this place. That really helped me to stay relevant and to really think about not just my own perspective of this place, but the perspective of all these different demographics of people that work with me.

**A -** Yeah. I think how we define our role as a producer in terms of supporting artists working with communities has changed this last year quite a lot. And we found the word service. And so now we draw a distinction between the different modes we have as producers and co-producers. So the one that's most primarily focussed on co-creation is, is actually one of, of service. I might well find myself providing administrative licencing, logistical support to something that I have absolutely no creative ownership over at all and there, there may not be an artist in that, or there may be an artist providing a creative service as well. An active service, sorry, rather than a kind of consumer one. And so we find ourselves supporting and, and applying the skills we've learnt from making theatre without any element of co-creating in. Which I think is probably our first 15 years of our existence. To events that we have no artistic ownership of. And whilst that often requires, it's almost like our co-creation comes from shows here that have a community participation element in but actually look like pretty traditional plays and then here, acts where we are entirely in service and we have no creative input, let alone control. So that's a very strange co-creation but this world service has become really important to us this last, I'd say, kind of 12 months especially, but really two years where we come to understand that especially in our space, what people need is up to them. What they demand is up to them. We might, we might, we might hope to give them more options. We might hope to give them more hinterland to be able to choose from. You know, you can't decide you want Blood Brothers if you don't know Blood Brothers exists, and that's true of a whole host of things that aren't Blood Brothers. So. Yes. So that's, so service is, service is my response to that really. And that's become, yeah, as I say, if you spoken to me two years ago, I would have given you a completely different answer. Even six months ago. I would not have understood my answer that I've just given. But that's that's where we are now.

**D -** And it's really interesting you've said that Alan, because as somebody who has been at home during this last pandemic, I have no, I have not been able to access any communities. So the only access I've had is really amongst other artists. So actually, in terms of my role as producer right now, it has, it has been about creating and holding these spaces online just to enable an artist to have conversations and to listen. And suddenly, you know, this community who were so used to working with we can't, we can't be with them. That, that has, that kind of really threw me right at the beginning.

**A -** Yeah. Yeah. So that is, we're in an unbelievable state of privilege here as that is not a problem we've had. We have been to work every, every day of, we're on the year anniversary today of the lockdown and we've, we've come to work every day. I'm sat in a snooker room. And that's amazing. That is, I do recognise the privilege of that, that we have not. But it is also, it brings its own challenges. We kept up the same amount of creative output that we ever had before. But the reason why we look, the reason why I look this knackered is because actually large parts of the third sector, non artistic world, as well as the other parts of the artistic world, disappeared overnight and many of them haven't come back. So we found ourselves with a portfolio of responsibilities now that are all tangentially linked to the portfolio of responsibilities and connections and relationships that you're talking about that existed 14 months ago. But are now much more complicated, much more, much more difficult, much more, well, we just have to do more things. And that's really fascinating when it comes to, if your, if your principal relationship is, “Guys, please come to our space and do something really fun and cultural.” And then overnight, large sections of society closed down, but you still stay open. And when they turn up to do something fun and creative they go, “Have you got any milk?” And you're like, “We're not the milk people.” And they're like, “Yeah, but you're the only people still here.” And nationally of course, that isn't true. But within Holbeck that that did tend to be the case. So that in a way also, our relationship to communities and how artists broker them is that the people, you know, the 52 volunteers that come tomorrow to do a food bank, are all artists who, who would make work in this area and now find themselves not doing that, but delivering food. And I don't know what will happen to us after this, whether that will transform any of them. Will we make, will different art be made as a result of this? Or will we go back to making the same art? And all of these questions we are right on the cusp of at the minute as things start to wake up, loosen up, shake off.

**D -** It's interesting, isn't it? Because I was working with new emerging artists. And actually what they just needed was moments to just check in. Just check that they were okay. To, to realise, “Okay, my practise just needs to be on hold. I have to work differently. I can't go into a studio.” And it's just giving them someone, someone else to talk to and think, “Okay, this is how I navigate this.” Yeah. And to listen and and say, “It's alright, you know, we will all get, you know, get through it.”

**A -** But Chantal Common Wealth has still been producing work? I vigorously clap at all the pictures I see. There was a car park show a few months ago.

**C -** Yeah. Yeah. We're still definitely producing work. Quite exciting actually to be able to have, to be able to produce work. And some of that comes from being part of the Moving Roots Network that Battersea Art Centre are holding. And that's a network of, sort of, five producers across, across the country that are looking at how we support or how we actually deliver co-created work and tour it in, in five different locations. So that's exciting. And then here we've just finished an exhibition called US Here Now, which was at the beginning of lock down looked completely different. And it ended up being a photography portrait of place. And that was just about empowering people to see themselves in place, up high in a civic centre and tell the story of this place in a completely different way. So that was really lovely to be able to deliver across lockdown. And we were just really lucky with timing, in the way we timed things. And then, and then was, it was really lucky to get that displayed. So, yeah, we totally have been doing work and I suppose that changes. I mean, I completely agree with you about the idea of not telling communities what they need and really, really understanding and, and so that they know what they need. And what we can do is be vehicles, vessels. We can be resources to people, but we are actually delivering work. So there is a sort of an aspect of that where I do have to produce.

**D -** I just literally just had an experience of amnesia. So just listening to hear you speak, I completely forgot that we worked on a project during the pandemic and I'm thinking, what is going on? Why have I forgotten about this? And you've just reminded me that we had to constantly shift our whole thinking. So what was going to become this immersive exhibition became this virtual world that this group of young people in, for Home in Manchester were going to create this amazing alternative world physically in a space with Studio Morrison, and that never happened. So everything shifted online and I still think that there is a little bit of grieving for those artists because I think they wanted to celebrate. And an online opening screening doesn't quite allow, allow the hearts to, to, to, to celebrate all that hard work. That shabang moment. And I think it's just still, still in the air with, like many things. But it happened. And, you know, I congratulate them all for taking part and I don't know, it just seems like it wasn't quite what they wanted. But anyhow, it happened just the way it did. So maybe one of my roles as a producer is, is just getting people, you know, holding their hands and just saying, “This is OK.”

**C -** Yeah. Yeah. I think there's something, when we finally got it, we changed obviously the entire project to be something different, but when we were thinking about putting up an exhibition, we were also thinking and talking to people. I talked to a lot of people who said there was something about this disconnect with community. That they were missing seeing people, they were missing, remembering who their community were. And there was this like real state of disconnect for everybody. So for us, as a, as a sector, but also just people were just really missing, you know, the arts and crafts group, and their walking netball group. And then to see this group of people up high, so vibrant, I hope, sort of, reminded people of this wonderful community that we've got around us, that we will all be part of and be sort of celebrating again really shortly.

**A -** What do you think of some of the defining principles or qualities of creation and why? We've been thinking about this recently, as we've just changed our methodologies. Or we haven't changed our methodologies, we've changed how we've talked about our methodologies, because we didn't even know they were methodologies before. And one of the things that came out of it was care. We realised that one of the things that defined our work now, that perhaps didn't in the past, or we didn't recognise as we were doing it. We always cared that the work was good. We always cared that audiences would come away thrilled or whatever the appropriate adjective was. But that, that we approached everything we do with the same level of care. So, Debbie and Chantal, you just spoke about, you know, the amount of care you have for your participants. And we recognise that as one of our, our kind of guiding responsibilities, but also the care we have for the ability for this work to happen in the future. It's all well and good, you know, make the most amazing show in the world, but it is all scorched earth policy, and basically no one can make anything like this again in the city you're in for the next 10 years, then that probably isn't good enough. And, and, and also, we only work with people who care about the same things we care about, and that speaks to a set of shared values, but also not always. Maybe it's just that we work with someone who really cares and is full of care and is careful. And therefore, even though we don't have the same definition of what people say it might be or or exactly what subsidy might work or their politics might be completely different, that actually the common ground we find is care. And so I think one of the things, and it takes longer, it takes so much longer. We programme in this venue as an act of, sort of, well of co-creation and cultural, kind of, cultural democracy and it's just so exhausting, just so much longer than if we just want to do it. And that requires care. I have to, have the care about how it's done as well as what is done. And that has been a really, I think we've we've practised that for a number of years, but we hadn't found the word to be able to say, why is this important? This is ridiculous. This takes up so much more time. And it has an impact on people's, you know, if we're if we're here till nine o'clock every night, then that's a challenge. If, if I want to put my boy to bed or whatever it is, actually, care's really central to that, I think.

**D -** I think during this time as well. I think people generally who are in that rat race of working, I think what the pandemic has done is slow us down and slowing down and moving at a pace that feels right. Your gut tells you, “Yep, that's achievable.” That, that kind of embeds in, within that whole caring, isn't it? Because we're caring for our own healths as individuals. We’re caring for people who, who have had, you know, probably worse experiences. And I think for, for once, everybody is, understands that. Probably more so, more so now. Well, that's what I'm experiencing on, on these Zoom calls that I'm having and conversations with people. And I think people are important. I think maybe we've got to a point where actually people are really important. You know, in terms of the work I do, people have to come first. And I have to, you know, always think about, think about them and, and take them through a journey where they are that, you know, they might not always be happy. That's not the case. But they are willing to give it a go and try something they've never done before. OK. You know, and that's, that's to your relationships, isn't it, that they go, “OK, yeah, let's try this stuff. It's bonkers, but it's, it's going to be alright.”

**A -** It's interesting, sorry, it's interesting when the care that you've just explained Debbie, hits a professional theatre world, I think. That's one of the tensions. So this isn't one of the defining principles or qualities of co-creation, but it's one of the tensions when that when those principles apply. So one of the things we prided ourselves on for a long time is that we took this work that had an element of participation and then applied it to a professional world. So basically, we would be commissioned by theatre to deliver a play. But the way in which we did that play would be different. But the contract would be exactly the same as if, as if it was a, what we used to call a ‘Slung Low Pure Show’. And then all of a sudden you have a difficulty where where you're like, right, well my company's, I remember doing Camelot and, and some of the company saying this play is too violent and I'm like, this plays about English nationalism and is basically one long riot, with machine guns in the city centre of Sheffield. I have a problem because that's exactly what I sold The Crucible, and now the people who are powering it, and I completely agree with you Debbie in no way is this a disagreement, but there was a tension there going, oh, this is a bit of a problem because there are two opposing values or principles. And I don't know how to unpick that. In the end, and I'm thinking I suppose a lot is, a lot of the really big examples of co-creation have been happening within large, so I immediately think of the National Theatre's Pericles or any of those other examples of work that sits within the mainstream where there will be, for example, a show has to happen. You're like, “Well, show doesn't want to happen.” So I mean it's interesting that some of those defining principles and qualities that we might all agree on, depending on what Chantal says next, you might say, “No!”, but we might all agree on actually override some of that in professional theatre. And so as the whole sector moves towards borrowing the language, at least if not actually wearing the clothes of co-creation, we go, “Cool, but you do know that that might put you under…” if, if the most important thing is to care for people, then the show might not go on. And if you've stacked up, I remember it's why we don't do more than one week runs now in York, they stacked up three sold out shows in the pouring rain. It was an outdoor show. So there was no room for care for people there because the box office was so large. We couldn't, we had to go on. We couldn't go back. And so I yeah, I suppose I raised that just as a defining principle that comes into conflict with, conflict with one of the industries confining, defining principles, which is the show must go on. And that's interesting.

**C -** I think it is about, for me, communities, I am absolutely predominantly passionate about working with communities and communities so vary from very small groups of people to huge groups of people. And it's about the dynamics in them and how we work together and also how people's stories are told and platformed and whose story gets to be told and why. And, and a lot of the time when we talk about people's stories being told, it’s a lot about representation, which for me should be presence. So the people whose stories are being told and platformed should be present from start to finish in the language we use in the way that we recruit people to be part of the, the, the things that we, the processes were going on, the journeys that were going on. Every aspect of them needs to have the presence of the communities we're making for and with. So that's one, sort of, principle that I think is super important. Also, I feel like it's important that it has to be embedded, so we can do something, you know, I hate this term parachuting in and out. It happens all the time when people work with communities. I feel like the work that we do with communities should be so embedded and so empowering, and so, I can't think of the word, democratic that the artist could leave and that work would still happen, that the artist could leave at the start of the process and the work would still happen because the people in that process would hold it. And that everybody in that company, that's the community, the producers, we we all know and we're all so invested and part of that work that it takes no one person to lead that work through to fruition. And I feel like also there, there has to be this idea, for me, there has to be this idea of growth. I mean, we work site-specifically, so we're always talking about taking over place and why it's important to take over non arts places and places that people wouldn't associate with arts. And why that place? Does that place tell the story of the community that we want to hold in that space as an audience? So, has there been weddings there, parties like, what, what does, what stories to the walls tell of the place that we're taking over? But it's not just about taking that space over because it's neutral or because it's not theatre or arts like, it's about possibility isn't it. It's about what can happen when we come together and pull our power together in the space and, yeah, it's the power of possibility. And I think the whole of co-creation is, and as a methodology is the power of possibility for me.

**D -** I love what you said about presence. So as I'm coming out of this tunnel, this lockdown hibernation, I'm calling it, and going into this world knowing what I did before and how. I'm thinking very much about, “How am I going to continue collaborating?” And actually, I'm, my thinking at the moment is being gentle. Seeing what happens. We're going to turn up. We're going to turn up along these canals in this beautiful floating artwork, and we're just going to see what happens. And whoever interacts with us know this is this is a project called Small Bells Rings by Studio Morrison, this research vessel, this floating library, these stories. We're just going to see what, how people respond. We're going to see who walks past it. If people connect and want to have a discussion, then so be it. That will be a starting point. And I'm, you know, there's a bit of me, a lot of planning, a lot of people are planning scenarios after scenarios and actually some of that has to be put on halt for the moment. And we're trying to be present, and that's really hard. That's really hard. And, and going back to what, Alan, what you were saying in terms of there's a date, there's an opening, and there's the show must go on. Yeah, we've still got that pressure, but we're just going to see what happens as well. And that's really hard as a producer that's really thrown me.

**C -** But also really beautiful, that you can have all these interactions and connections and I'm sure it's going to be a really beautiful space.

**D -** Yeah, yeah. It, it's trying to be, we're just trying to be mindful that everybody is going to be coming back, and there are these layers of, “Are people going to be comfortable coming together?” You know, having been doing what they've been doing in the last year. How do we start just weaving back into people's consciousness?

**C -** Oh, absolutely.

**A -** It's also about trying to get other people, and I suppose, in this I mean, I'm thinking about people who give permissions and resources and, and value I suppose. It's getting them to decide that, that we will measure what we think is important and we will, we will let them know. So, and practically, I suppose here we have a space. And one of the things we decided about this space in this transformational last two years is that anybody can have the space to do anything they want. Everybody gets what they want. No one can stop other people doing what they want. So if that means if you come to me and you want to do you want to host a, a comedy about the Old Testament that's being toured by a Christian theatre group? Great. That's that's OK. You're an important part of our, but equally the next night, if there's a safe space queer cabaret on, then I don't want to hear you, I don't wanna hear your nonsense because everybody gets to use the space. And one of the things that we've been working really hard in terms of a principle of co-creation with the people who value what we do and therefore fund it, but not just fund it. Is, that space being used for a cabaret with Davina De Campo's School of Night and, and a seven piece band is good. It is important that has a cultural unit of 100. But that space being used for your nana's birthday party where everybody comes and they have the best time in the world and they remember that for the rest of your life is as important and has a cultural value of 100 units. And that and that, that's that's really hard for people to hold onto. It's really hard for, you know, because, because one of the ways we value things about, is about how they're spoken about in the media, but also how they're spoken about in the industry. And there isn't a group of artistic directors sat around going, “How on earth did he ever get Nana to do her birthday party upstairs?” But they are sat around going, “How did they get Davina De Campo to play that flea pit in South Leeds?” And actually, that's that's some of the - she was amazing. But there's some of the, the, the value in which we trade off. And we, we talk here a lot about, we leverage, because we are national theatre makers and, and there are people who give us a value, we leverage that cultural value and that cash to be able to then, like literally, just have that at the, the service of whoever walks through the door next. And so, and again, a sort of practical solution. We will open our sports club in two months. And we're doing that because we've spent the year being a food bank and the food, sorry, the health outcomes of, of Holbeck are terrible and the domestic violence rate is five times what the average in the city would be and so we're doing that, but it's also because two people walked through the door who lived in Beeston and said, we really want a sports club. And we're like, right. And that's costing as much, in terms of time and admin and as, as if we did, if we did a show that Leeds 2023 had paid for and everyone talked about The Guardian or whatever, the current measure of nonsense is. And so I suppose, and that requires us, because I'm not going to get to play in this football club, and it turns out that with the exception maybe of chopping up the oranges and taking them at halftime, I'm not really going to be very useful at all. So that requires us to get rid of quite a lot of ego because it's still quite a lot of work and it's quite a lot of work in service to something that I don't, I've got to be honest, I don't care about. I care about the effects it has not the thing itself. And so I suppose one of the, one of the defining principles of co-created work is that it has a different relationship to the artist's ego than the work that isn't co-created.

**D -** Also I, also as part of that, that tool kit of principles that are needed for co-creation is that original intention. So if everyone around that table want the, wants the sports, football, whatever you do, if they all have agreed, that's what they're intention and that's what they all agreed that's the main aim then surely that's really important, isn't it? That they all agreed and they had a clear objective. So you can be in goal and I can be a linesman's because we know that the outcome will be this fantastic football game and Chantal will be there blowing the whistle at the end. Because for a good collaborative project, I guess, you know, everybody knows the clear intentions, what's going to happen. They all know that the relationship is authentic and they trust some, not all of the people they're working, but they're willing to give it a go. You know, the values have been discussed and, you know, they're still they're still coming back. And yeah, I think and then it's that whole. OK, roles and responsibility. Alan's in goal, I'm defence, Chantal's going to be chopping those oranges. That's everyone's roles and responsibilities, all agreed. And then it's just, you know, the day, the day of the game. And then everyone talks about it, which is, you know, the evaluation part and how well we did. It's got to be a two way thing, hasn't it is always got to happen two ways. If an artist asks for something, then you've got to reciprocate, reciprocate and do something for them. And, you know, I know a group of young people, all they want to do was just make badges for the whole workshop. You know, we got this amazing artist, Mark Titchner, I think, you know, Turner Prize nominee is here and they just wanted to make badges. And he's like, yeah, we're making badges for the whole day. That's alright. Because that's what Mina and Lorna wanted to do. And that and they will know that, if they listen to this.

**C -** What would you say are the biggest challenges facing co-creation as a practise? I think that everybody thinks it's going to be an easy process and so going to be sunshine and rainbows and we're all going to be happy. And it's not, it's difficult. You know, it's difficult relationships to manage. It is. You know, sometimes the expectation in the meeting room is not what life actually is. And you have to sort of, yeah, create some kind of like bridge or understand that you're working with people who might not want to sit in a meeting room with you, for example. Yeah. The relationships can be, not difficult to manage, I don't think it's difficult to manage. I think the expectation can sometimes be something that's difficult to manage the expectation of, let's just call it the meeting room, because the meeting room can be by lots of different things and actually, what it is to deliver co-created work on the ground.

**D -** I think trust has to be there. Trust, everybody has to trust, you know. And it, what's really interesting, some people have completely, really bizarre, what the actual definition of co-creation means. Once you've got that out of the bag, there's a whole debate there. And yeah, I think you're right Chantal, some people think it's really easy. So they go, right. We're going to co-create this. We're going to, we're going to drop our guard, but they've not really thought about the whole process. And actually, if you're going to create with someone, you've got to get everybody in right at the start. If you bring people in at different points, it's like, “Hang on a second, you've not consulted with me. No way. Everything's been decided that I've not been, been there.” And that can be really problematic.

**A -** Yes, I agree. I agree with both of those. I think the expectations of, of, and in a way, both sides of the, both sides of the fence and as an especially as co-creation has become, incredibly, it's in vogue. The words are I agree with Chantal, like, the actual hard graft of, well, maybe you're not going to get what you want. This is not going to be the sunshine on leaf moment that you think it's going to be. Um, yeah, that's a problem because and that's where I think we've started to see some really bad examples of practise called co-creation or, and there are other words and then you're like, oh, please don't do that in my name. Oh, please don't do that, because you're going to make the argument so much harder. And yeah, so that's I think that's that's one of the really biggest challenges, just the idea that any group of people are going to behave like you want them to or even that you should want them to behave in a certain way, is weird. But that's, but the, you know, the business of being commissioned to make art is weird, isn't it?

**D -** I think time - you're never really given the right amount of time that, you know, for co-creation to, to be pure and genuine. Just don't give it a timeline. Or if you do, you say right you've got five to 10 years to do this right, or learn from your mistakes. That, that's the ideal scenario.

**C -** I was going to say there's no, the value of the process. There's a, there's an undervalue of process. And it's like there has to be an outcome. And yeah, OK, we all want an outcome that's going to be fantastic. But at the same time the process is just as valuable, if not more valuable in this way of working for me, than the outcome itself.

**A -** What are the supports you've needed and/or lacked in terms of making work through co-creation?

**D -** Do you feel supported, Alan? Chantal, do you feel supported?

**C -** I actually do, like I really do. I feel like the company that I work for trust the work that I do and I'm very much left to, to do that work. And then when I need it the support is there for me in the wider sector I don't really want to comment on that. I don't think it's really my. I do the work that I do when I'm supported in the work that I do.

**A -** I'll comment Chantal, because, because, I don't, I've got enough friends. I think, I think, there's a, there's a thing that we've been really guilty of here at Slung Low. I've been really guilty of here at Slung Low, is competing for resources and time, crucially. It always comes down to cash in the end, but, but, but actually, before you get there, it's about time and it's about value. And status, actually. Just what do we value? And we've been really guilty of of doing that within, for want of a better term, the mainstream theatre and I think that, that's been really problematic. That's been for the say, for the reasons we've discussed before, is that people want certain outcomes and they want and and that's meant that we've had sometimes, it is a binary choice. If I get if I get the prep work wrong and where I get the, the space and the money from is, is the wrong thing, then there will come a binary choice. Which is I have to deliver a thing because we are contracted to and I have a group of people and in our case they're normally around 250 who are on a journey and at some point the metal hits the road. And the only thing that we've been able to do, and we haven't been able to stop that. Normally what happens is I demonstrate to my company, to my to my gang how we are fighting for that not to have a damage on them and their process, but that we will, that we will, we will be destroyed or we will be broken in that. And that actually, has only happened three or four times, and that has been enough to generate goodwill in that company to go, “OK, OK, this isn't ideal, but we get that you have done everything you can and so we're willing to carry on.” And actually the realisation that we came to three years ago is actually it's just not good enough, is just not good enough. It's just not. That's ridiculous and that we're clever enough to have the imagination to know that's going to happen and therefore we need to do something about it before it goes. So that's so we came up with a different, we like, “We've got to stop working for people who don't get it.” And who are going to, now that we have a sector that I think the myth is, is over that the sector will keep growing to have enough room for everyone. That the pie will keep growing so that we can where everybody gets a slice, that, that's gone. The pie is not going to grow anymore. So now we've got to make choices about who gets a slice. So when it comes to representation, if we want to have more black and brown faces on stage, we're going to have to stop hiring so many white faces. It's just a fact now. And if we want more co-created work, if we want people to genuinely feel cultural democracy and ownership and participation, not in the departments at the edges of our cultural organisations, but at the heart of them, we're going to have to do less Twelfth Night. It's just a fact. So cry me a river for Twelfth Night. And that's that's not a conflict that I wanted, but it's a conflict that has come nonetheless. And so now we don't go into buildings and say we can sit in, which we used to, we can sit in your autumn, in your autumn season and deliver the same things that your production of Pride and Prejudice can, just give us the same resources, because the people who in the end get damaged by that, even though I think that they would go, the damage was OK, but that's not good enough, are the participants. And so now we need a different tactic. So now we like well, hang on a minute. We need we need to place co-creation and cultural democracy at the heart of those organisations and these shows, just as you've, these projects sorry, just as you've described Debbie, they need to be given the time to be the thing they need to be, as opposed to an imitation of something else. And that, that has taken us a long time to get to, partly because we because we're not powerful. You know, we were a tiny boat and we go with the tide. But we, I've woken up a couple of years ago to, that it still doesn't matter. All of that isn't an excuse. It's still my responsibility. And therefore, we need to create the space in which those participants can be protected from the bullshit, and that's really important to us now.

**D -** Now, I guess my take on it is, is the fact that during the pandemic in particular, I was very envious of individuals who were part of organisations as a, as an independent producer. I thought, “Oh my goodness, I'm on my own here.” I got furlough envy and thought, “Oh my goodness, I'm going to have to get some funding.” because all my work, most of it was, was on hold, went on hold. And you think, you realise how your networks are really crucial. And for those who aren’t, who don't have those strong networks, how do they survive? How do they get information? How do they get that support? I found really, useful because I you know, I obviously have some great networks and that is purely because I've been around for such a long time. But for anyone who is starting their career, how do they just get their foot in the door and just survive and continue being there, this imaginative, ambitious, creative person? And I think, you know, more support really is needed for those new emerging artists to believe that they can survive this, this time. It is really infuriating these whole fund, you know, putting artists and freelancers up to compete for such small amounts of funding is really, is really tricky. I'm one of these people, I just, I can't apply. I just can't, I hate applying for funding, and that's just embedded in my, in my soul. So seeing these grants and opportunities, you know, I would have a look, but, oh, I just, I they really hurt, they're just agonising. I'm just very lucky that there were other people pushing me to, to apply and do it. But I'm just thinking maybe there's better ways to connect people if you don't have those skill sets, mentoring, coaching ways to support those individuals, to gain the skills they need, particularly if you're on your own, I guess.

**C -** How do you address your professional development needs currently? I think this one's difficult, particularly for me. I, I work really hard in the roles that I do and, and when I and I, I mean, I work really hard, like I really want to make a difference. And that's the whole reason why I'm doing the work that I do. And I mean, we've not got into in this conversation, but my background is definitely leans towards me voluntarily, I worked voluntarily for 15 years in the arts, and I'm really passionate about what the arts can give as an opportunity and what change you can have. And in my own professional development, I feel like you get kind of boxed into roles almost. So I was like, now I'm a producer, but actually I can do loads of other things, but I don't get a chance to explore any of those. And then I just continue to do that, continue in the role that I'm in. I don't get a chance to really explore my own creativity and explore who I am, and the projects that I would love to to lead on is difficult when you're working for an organisation or you're working for other people.

**D -** I currently have a kind of mentor, coach, just somebody who I can just spend an hour just trying to unpick this crazy brain of mine. I'm finding that really valuable just for, you know, for many, many reasons, you know, having to navigate work differently. I find that really keeps me going. Recently I've just checked in with quite a few producers that I know as friends, just to just see how they're getting on and checking in with artists, making sure that they’re alright and, you know, just trying to remind myself. Chantal, I don't know what your art background is, but you know, I did Fine Art Sculpture, and I, I love drawing and doodling, so I bring that into my work now. I do a lot of visual, visual diagrams, visual agendas. You know, a project plan I sent to a big, a project just to give them an idea on the future of this project and it was just a drawing of a mountain and a pathway, and it had the end result at the top.

**A -** Brilliant

**D -** And that was like, this is the project plan.

**C -**  I love that.

**A -** Yeah.

**D -** And it worked. It worked because what I was trying to say was right now, in this state of time, I have no, I have no answers. I can't tell you what's happening because I don't know anything. I can't plan anything up until the 12th of April, you know, those Boris little road maps that are in our subconsciousness. Whether they happen, I really don't know. Yeah. I think I think there's a need to be, just have fun, have a bit of fun, you know, and just, just do something completely different. You know, keep us, keep us kind of entertained a bit.

**A -** We're really lucky here at Slung Low. We, we prioritise continuing adult education. So we have a reasonably large training budget which the team are encouraged to, to use to do anything that isn't to do with our current job. So we spend it on all sorts of chainsaw courses. Uh, I'm waiting for someone to do like a wine tasting or something that really takes the piss. But, um, and we also have adventure training programmes. So every three months we, um, we go and do something that scares us, actually just that's literally, it can be anything you want as long as it's as it's a bit difficult. So that might be, some of them, and each time a different member of the team gets to choose, so we go caving, abseiling or just walk up a mountain or whatever. This Friday is one of them and one of the team is in charge of, we have to cut down a tree. It's a really big tree. It's going to take a long time. And so the whole team have had to learn the skills needed to do that. And what's, I suppose, the reason why we do that is, because we're not going to chop down a tree any, it's not, that's it, that's the only time we do it, is that the learning of new skills makes you a little bit braver. Like we know that from our cultural community college just, and it doesn't matter what it is. We've done it in blacksmithing or bread baking. It doesn't matter what it is. It's just learning now ones allow you to sort of remain flexible, and I think that's really important because nobody here has a job, they can have whatever job title they want, and their job description changes. We run a football team now, that football team wasn't in anyone's job description three months ago, it just didn't exist. We run a pub that wasn't, that didn't exist two years ago. And we're about to go into residency, a primary school. And that isn't something that was on anybody's radar five months ago. And so the idea that anyone on the team would turn around and go, “Woah, not me gov, that's not what I do.” Is we have to build that suppleness into us, otherwise we'd crack. We've run a food bank for a year and none of us really, we didn't know anything about that 14 months ago. So that's so there's a kind of formal pattern there. They, they can use that training money to go and learn, and they do, like, how to be better at Excel or how to run a, one they all like actually is a, how to keep a decent to do list. It's like a two day. So they do that and that's great, but equally they come and say, “I am going to go and do canoeing.” That no one would tell me, like, OK. They don't have to ask my permission. They just have to tell me when they're not going to be here so I can work out who's going to cover them. I get my professional development, I'm an Army reservist. I'm, I'm in the Royal Engineers. So I spend about two months of the year with them. And the really useful thing about that is every single thing they've ever taught me has been directly usable at work in some way or another. Doesn't matter what it is, there's a different way of thinking about the world. We, my unit builds hospitals in Africa and puts bridges across West Germany. So nothing to do with theatre, nothing to do with co-creation, sort of. Maybe the hospitals are. But, um, just, just the process of having to do that work with completely different groups of people. Groups of people who are not in any way like the people you find in the arts, but are perhaps a little bit more like the people you might find in my community, is a really useful thing and has been the central, most pivotal thing to my professional development. I could not have opened the Food Bank. Our Food Bank has had to go through five transformations and I mean radical transformations. We've moved. We now deliver 300 a week. I would not have been able to build those systems if it wasn't for my time in the Army Reserve.

**D -** What is lovely about that professional development is choice. It's own personal choice. It has a connection with you and it's not work related, as we would see it. And that's really quite, quite magical, really. I did some work last year for People Make It Work and what was really lovely about doing some work with them was they offered me, they said “Right at any point during your, during your time with us, if you need your coach, get in touch or you need your yoga holistic practitioner to help you out or your therapist or your researcher, just just let us know.” And they gave us all the details, but I was too scared to take it on because I didn't I couldn't believe it. I think I was in shock. I was like, “Is this really happening?” And I thought that was, but I look back now and go, “Wow, that was wonderful.” But Alan, you're taking it to the next level. And I think, like, crazy that saw, you know, the saw making workshop, you know. Just stuff like that. It's just yeah.

**A -** Yeah, it's good fun. So it's a nice way to live. It's not without you know. They work really hard here. They work really hard. They are, they are battered by our collective ambition and they know it and we, we recognise that, and that's, but there are some trade offs. There are, there are some, there are easier ways of making money, but there are less, there are a lot less fun ways of making a living than the one we've got.

**D -** Yeah, we did that recently. We gave these, these young artists. We said, look, we've got, we've got one hundred and fifty pounds of bursary that we want to give to you. Just let us know how you want to spend it. And we were really vague. They just had to write a sentence and why. And that was it. And we just said, yeah, you can have it. Because we, you know, it's important to them and we don't need to know the ins and outs of it really.

**A -** Amazing.