



Sonya Soares:

Before we start, I just want to acknowledge the land on which we stand, which is the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations. I'd like to pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and in particular, their storytellers, since we gather here very often to tell stories. Our event today is Auslan interpreted and audio described, but we might just put a call out at about the 20-minute mark to see whether there's take-up for these facilities. And I have a bunch of notes, so please forgive me while I refer to them, but welcome, everyone, to the Just Not That Many - Real Talk Panel.

My co-panellists today are two of my co-instigators of the #JustNotThatMany Campaign, Artemis Muñoz and Alice Qin [[and I'm going to take a moment to read a short bio for each, as I think it's useful to know](#)] who's speaking to you at these things. Artemis Muñoz is an early career actor, theatre maker, comedian, cabaret artist, composer and poet. Their credits include 'Taint Cabaret' and 'Ace of Hearts' from this year's Midsumma Festival alongside 2018 appearances in 'Wit Incorporated', 'Ophelia Thinks Harder', 'MUST Cabarets', 'Queer Night', 'Magic Happens', 'A Queer Lady Magician Fundraiser', and 'Share: The Youth Issues Musical'. Artie can also be defined by their penchant for watching too many movies and starting too many projects. They are a proud activist sitting on MEAA's Equity Diversity Committee and Trans/Non-Binary, Gender Diverse Committee, and are super excited to be continually working with a number of awesome, diverse creatives on the #JustNotThatMany Campaign.

Welcome, Artie.

Alice, Alice Qin is an actor, teacher and theatre maker with a strong interest in reaching communities previously shut out from the theatre world with new works and radically reimagined classics. -- Isn't this awful, when people read out your bios? Yeah, yeah, sorry about it! -- She trained at the Stella Adler Studio in New York, and after graduation, she apprenticed under Joan Evans and is certified to teach the Joan Evans technique of physical acting, which I want to know more about, actually, sidebar. Her favourite New York theatre credits include: 'Is It Already Dusk', an ensemble physical theatre piece exploring trauma post 9/11; 'Romeo and Juliet', 'Richard II', 'Love's Labour's Lost' and her Australian acting credits include 'Atomic' at Malthouse Theatre in 2018 and 'Little Emperors' in Malthouse Theatre in 2017. Welcome, Alice.



Now, the wonderful Kate Hood, who was also billed to be speaking on our panel today, has very sadly suffered a tragedy, the loss of a close friend, and is at a memorial today in Central Victoria. And so, she sends her apologies, but she's also sent through a number of responses to my intended provocation, so we will still have the benefit of Kate's voice and experience today. You'll just have to permit me to throw my voice into imaginary Kate from time to time, and in Kate's stead, we are very lucky to be joined by Carly Findlay, the Access and Inclusion Coordinator at Melbourne Fringe, the proud woman living with a rare skin condition, ichthyosis, did I pronounce that correctly?

Carly's first book, a memoir called 'Say Hello', was released in January 2019. She's also working on editing 'Growing Up Disabled in Australia' with Black Inc. Books. She writes on disability and appearance diversity issues for news outlets including ABC, SBS, The Age, Sydney Morning Herald. She was named as one of Australia's most influential women in the 2014 Australian Financial Review, and Westpac 100 Women of Influence Awards. She's appeared on ABC TV, so you can't ask that, and Cyber Hate with Tara Moss, and has been a regular on various ABC radio programmes. She's spoken all over the world and organised the history-making Access to Fashion, a Melbourne Fashion Week event featuring disabled models.

This is where it gets worse, I have to do me. So, hello to anybody who doesn't know me, my name is Sonya Soares. I shouldn't need to refer to my notes to talk about myself, but I'm tempted. This is my 25th year working in film, telly and theatre, which is vaguely alarming. I guess, if I had to describe my practice, I like to work on shifting long-established paradigms in our sector, and that informs my work in the independent sector, from working as General Manager of Red Stitch for four years to co-creating The Poppy Seed Festival, to founding Watch This, which is Australia's only Sondheim repertory company, an independent music theatre outfit. And I'm also frequently involved / working a lot, a lot, a lot in the development of new Australian writing. That'll do, that's who we are, hooray! So... So, I guess, I might throw to you, Alice, if you don't mind doing a wee overview, because this whole panel takes its genesis from the #JustNotThatMany campaign, so maybe we should talk just a little bit from the outset about what that is, how the campaign came into being, what it stands for, and what the provocation is to both [the community and the broader sector](#).



Alice Qin:

#JustNotThatMany Campaign is a visibility campaign that was, well, it was spearheaded by Sonya, and then she brought it to us during one of our EDC Diversity Committee meetings, and we all thought it was such a fantastic idea. It gives truth to the lie that there is just a lack of talent for all these diverse communities. Whenever a casting pops up for, you know [...] or whenever something goes wrong in the casting situation, we think, oh, we always hear: “oh, you know, there are just not that many of them”. But what we have discovered through, you know, hosting all of our various photoshoots is that, no, there is actually a plethora of diverse talent in this country, and it's actually beautiful to see. And the side benefit of running this campaign is just the community we've built around all of these photoshoots. Every single time we have one of these, we actually all get together and see each other, and it is-- Are you okay? Okay. -- So, basically, we have all decided, when we first started doing this, to spearhead one photoshoot each for whatever community that we identify with. It started with a Desi women photoshoot back at the end of last year, in December, and they have this super stunning Vanity-Fair-looking shot of all these beautiful women in Saris in the bush. And so, then me and Ra Chapman actually took the baton and decided on Asian, you know, East Asian [Australians](#), let's just all be in our urban wear, let's be super urban. And we had a really great shoot at Malthouse. And then we had a gorgeous trans and non-binary shoot out by the Botanical Gardens, and that was also [...]. And so, we've had a series of photoshoots, and just last week, we had our biggest shoot yet with a call out for every community, and we had over 50 people here.

Sonya Soares:

[The provocation](#) to the sector is a DIY. So what we say on our channels - we run across three channels, Facebook, Insta and Twitter - and what we say is, you know, with the first one is like, why wait for Vanity Fair to come knocking when we can DIY? So, I guess we modelled that, each of us who were leading the campaign modelled that, but it is about provocation to the community to find your community, gather your peers together and celebrate. And that can be something that you instigate or it can be something that you know is about to happen, that you're going to be in a rehearsal room with seven Indigenous women, and so, take a photo for us, and then send it into the campaign. So, it's not something that we organise as such, it's sort of democratic in its conception in that anyone with an iPhone can be part of the #JustNotThatMany Campaign, was the way that we conceived it. And I think, as we can hear, the campaign takes as a given that there is an



acknowledged, deep-rooted inequality of opportunity in our industry, and that's our starting point. I wrote an article for MEAA's Equity magazine back in 2017, and I basically said, like, what is there left to say on this issue that hasn't been argued cogently and passionately and persuasively for decades. So, I think, rather than kind of dwelling in that space of, like, why is this campaign necessary, is there / isn't there a structural inequality, I kind of would prefer to move right past that and just take it as a given that there is. And I think the more interesting point, and what I'd like to start unpacking with this panel, and indeed, everyone in the room, is that if we all know this, and very often, in advocacy work, like Alice was just kind of referring to, when you're discussing this with colleagues, people fall all over themselves to agree with you: "oh, yes, yes, yes, absolutely, it's really important that we have, you know, a diverse person or a non-white person in this role, it's just in this case, dot, dot, dot." So, if we all know that this structural inequality exists, why does it persist, is what I think is an interesting question, and what can we do about that? So, we've got this campaign, [\[and it gives the lie to the idea that\]](#) there is some sort of shortage in supply. And yesterday's Tony Awards, did anyone see the Tony's yesterday? Yay! How wonderful was it? You know, there was this incredible recognition of women and people of colour and artists with a disability, and it was extremely affirming, and there were some great speeches given, and I'm just gonna quote Rachel Chavkin for a hot second. She said, "This is not a pipeline issue. It is a failure of imagination by a field whose job it is "to imagine the world the way it could be. So, let's do that." So, with that to one side, and maybe we can circle back later, I want to head into the territory of self-determination, appropriation of stories, and the term coined by the disability community: "Nothing About Us Without Us". So, I might ask you, Carly, to kick off this one and your thoughts on that kind of territory.

Carly Findlay:

Yes, sure. So, today, I'm talking in my role at Melbourne Fringe, and also outside of Melbourne Fringe, I'm a writer, speaker, event-maker. Last year, or the year before, I put out a tweet. I'm gonna read you something, I think you might be aghast. I hope your reaction is as bad as mine was. I write a lot about my skin condition, ichthyosis, and I joke about how I don't want to see another article about ichthyosis unless it's written about me because, by me rather, because it's so, so awful, the way it's portrayed, you know, we're often dehumanised. The stories are told for us, not by us. So, an amazing young person put out an article in the New York Times, they have ichthyosis, and I said, "Another



fantastic piece by a writer with ichthyosis. I can't describe how happy I am to see others centred in this story," and then I linked to the article. A writer, a white woman, not disabled, she hasn't got ichthyosis, jumped in on my tweet and said: "I wrote a story about ichthyosis once". And I said, "Can I see it?" And she said, "It's a story with fantasy elements about the fairy, Museline - she was scaled from the waist down - and her descendants." I said, "I have ichthyosis." She said, "I don't, the story was published in the U.S. in 1997 and was about a family with a severe form, and so, exhibited in carnivals." So, that was our conversation. She centred herself in my tweet around another person with ichthyosis centering themselves in the media, and I found out, I did some digging and someone found the story for me, and it was terrible, and it was dehumanising. It depicted a person with ichthyosis as a mythical creature. The story won an award in 1997. And then I started writing my book, so I wonder if she's read it, but there's stories like 'The Greatest Showman', for example. 'The Greatest Showman' was made in 2017, and I went to see it, and I quite liked it, and then I thought about it more, and then I hated it. People in the cinema that I was sitting in were gasping at a woman with a beard. They were gasping at the people with Albinism. As far as I know, I think there were two actors with Albinism in the film, and one short-statured actor, Sam Humphrey, and the rest of the people were, as we call it, crippling up, so they were playing disability. They were, like, doing the equivalent of blackface around disability. The story was around a freak show in the 19th Century in America, where a non-disabled man was profiting from their stories. And while I acknowledge and I have written about the importance of community for the people within the circus - they felt like they made friends and that they were probably in a better situation than they were in their own communities - there was still a white man making money off their stories. But then, the movie was made, and so, a bunch of people were going to see it voyeuristically. People were heart-warmed, people were, you know, crying at the story. And I remember sitting in the cinema, and the woman in front of me was scared at this person who played the bearded lady, and I remember saying to my mum afterwards: "if she turns around and sees me, what's she going to think of a person with a facial difference if she can't even handle that person on screen?"

Sonya Soares: So, this project made monsters -

Carly Findlay: Yeah.



Sonya Soares: - of these characters. And in a way, you often get the disclaimer with that sort of stuff, or the kind of apologia of: "but we're examining that, we're showing that". And I argue in those cases, you're actually reproducing it, is the truth.

Carly Findlay: - And then you are reproducing this, a freak show, in 2017, which has now become a theatre show. You know, what next?

Sonya Soares: So, Kate writes on this, I might throw my voice into Kate at this point, and she says: "We artists with a disability talk about disability-led practice. This means performance projects which are about us need to be led by us. We're happy to share the lead, but not to be used. It's about the lived experience of disability being recognised as a precious commodity and one that can make the work better. The authorship will be based on reality because of this. One in five people in Australia live with a disability of one sort or another- that's 20%. We are represented on our stages and screens at just about 4%, and usually an able-bodied actor 'crips up' to play the role. We are rarely seen on stages and screens playing ourselves". And her dot point at the bottom is "Action: make quotas mandatory within our industry. Make access a priority in your practice."

Maybe, at this point, 'cause I did say at 20 minutes we would do a little shout-out around our Auslan interpreting, are we happy to continue, or is anyone availing at this point of the service? Are you happy to - thank you so much, thank you so much. It's really important. So, we really appreciate Arts Centre Melbourne making that offer as well, around Auslan interpreting and audio description.

Artie, are you maybe able to speak to authoring and casting work that demands a trans or non-binary or gender diverse character without ensuring the right collaborators to author that story in the first place? What's your experience on this one then?

Artemis Muñoz: Ooh, boy! Is this on? Yeah. It is on, cool, I can't really hear it, but that's cool. Yeah!

When people have a trans role and they can't find anyone, it comes to me, and they're like, ah, we've got two days left, we've got this really great gay man who's more than happy to play this trans woman, but we want to cast it authentically, can you find someone? Two days, okay,



thank you. Number one is that's an impossible amount of effort and labour on my part to do. But number two, if you're leaving it to that [too late] in the process, what it's actually showing is that you don't actually care about who is portraying these stories. And probably, if you don't have someone who has those type of connections in the writing or the direction of it, it's gonna be shit. Sorry, but yeah, you're going to be telling a story inauthentically. Even if I find someone who's available, they're probably not going to want to do the work because the work is probably not going to represent them. I myself have taken on projects where the work has been a bit eeuw in the hopes that I can fix it, and it's so much stress and labour, and often you don't even get it close to what it needs to be to authentically be able to tell the story that we need to tell. And it just happens over and over again to the point where I can't think of many stories at all that have felt representative of the trans community. Even if you do have trans performers playing those roles, those roles aren't written from a place of authenticity. They're written from a place of, like, "look how frikkin' weird trans people are!" and that's not the type of story we need to be championing at all.

Sonya Soares:

Rachael Maza - I recall, just listening to Rachael Maza giving this incredible keynote speech. Was anybody at the 2015 [Australian Theatre Forum?] If you haven't seen it, I really, it's still up on, I think, the Australian plays link. Australian plays link is still live, australianplays.org/rachael-maza-keynote. She gave an incredible keynote speech with respect to Indigenous artists and storytelling and collaboration versus appropriation. And I think that the thing is that there's a through line, you know, you can speak about it differently, use different terms, but it's a through line around appropriation or not being included in the act of authoring your own identity and seeing yourself on the stage, which is really key. I mean, we acknowledge that representation is vital for the health of our sector. It's vital for the vibrancy of our sector. We know that, people: if you can see it, you can be it. So, if there's authentic representation out there, it does something, it calls to people. And we can go on to talk about Box Office 'cause that's one of those ones that I would love to talk about in a hot second. But I think, if we know this, then having that thinking from the beginning, from the origin point of the storytelling, *before* you have like a wacky idea, "you know, what I'd really like to do is tell this story because this is a hot topic" and appropriate it, and then get someone in at the eleventh hour to maybe help you. I think because we all work on the Equity Diversity Committee, we kinda get it at the eleventh hour,



when people essentially want us to solve their problem. But really, actually, it's kind of not even they want us to solve their problem or actually want help. It's almost like they want absolution. They want us to say, "it's okay to cast that gay man, or it's okay for this character, who's historically black, for you to cast an Italian lady". And then you'll do an incredible amount of work and go: "these are all the black actresses that you haven't thought of that are actor/singer/dancers. Oh you've loaded up that track so that it also has to be a Dance Captain track - I don't know why you did that! But here are also, you know, also all of the actor/singer/dancers that could do that." And then you deliver them that work and you never hear back from them 'cause actually what they wanted you to say was, "it's fine, it's fine, just cast whoever". And it gets a bit on the nose [after a point in terms of the lead times], and the appropriate process and the thinking around our stories.

Carly Findlay:

- I also think that the expectations of non-disabled people for disabled people are so low that they can't imagine disabled people working as professional actors. So, last year, I was asked by a company to assist in calling out for a casting opportunity, and so, I was getting a fee, which was very, very small, and the actors were getting a fee, but I was getting a percentage of their fee, or something. But in the end, like, I sent an email out to maybe 30 people, and then my fee ended up being, you know, like a hundred dollars or something because they only found one of those 30 people. But in the engagements between some of the people that I recommended, the company said: "oh, no, we're not really looking for professional actors, we're looking for just regular disabled people", as if they couldn't possibly be working as professional actors anyway. It was a really odd situation, where they didn't want to engage professional actors because they were worried about how much they were going to pay them, and all of that. Then I had to diffuse that situation, for my hundred dollars.

Sonya Soares:

Yeah, it's quite a lot. So, this actually takes us really neatly into this next section that I'd like to subtitle: Setting Artists Up For Success. Because we know every time that we're on stage or if we're directing a show, or lighting it, or writing it, we're effectively auditioning for our next job or casting opportunity. Our colleagues see our work and they either invite us to audition for or direct, light, write the next gig, or they don't. And Alice, can you maybe talk a little bit to your experience of being made to see your identity as an obstacle, or the impact of being typecast or sidelined in those processes?



Alice Qin: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I could talk about, you know, today, this morning, I was having a think about this, and I could talk about sob stories, but we've all kind of heard varying versions of them. And so, that's kind of, I keep coming back to, you know, back when I was a teenager and auditioning for drama schools a million years ago. Back then, I remember, first of all, this prominent [\[Australian director saying to me that Asian female characters were\]](#) varying degrees of dragon lady and lotus flower. So, there's that, but also, he was really excitedly telling me about this recent graduate they had, who was Asian Australian and who was such a success. He was booking all of these roles, he was doing all of these classical plays, and it was because he was transcendent, it was because he was exceptional, it was because he was better than, and that story was told to me aspirationally. And it's so fucked up that, first of all, he was telling me that, and that he didn't see that he was fucked up. Why do we have to be exceptional? Why do we have to overcome whatever-it-is box that we're ticking for you?

Sonya Soares: [Lee Lewis](#) talks about this. She talks about, in her Platform Paper from 2007, which is now like 12 years old, she talks about the idea that the white body is transformative, but the non-white body is bound. And so, you get a version, like when you tell that story, that there's a version of that in that story, the assumption that for that actor to have transformed is somehow 'extra' because that body is the site of a whole lot of signifiers placed on us by...

Alice Qin: - Well, a tradition of storytelling.

Sonya Soares: - A tradition of storytelling, which centres white people and centres able bodies, to look at different lines, or centres, like, a gender binary. Carly, I guess your thoughts on this, on these ideas of setting up for success, I mean, you're an Access and Inclusion Officer.

Carly Findlay: I mean, for me, as at Fringe, I hope to encourage performers, whether they're non-disabled or not, to make their show accessible from the start. So, I've got this really handy guide, which you can pick up at the back, there's a few copies, otherwise online at melbournefringe.com.au. It is the producers' guide to access. What we did firstly was took an existing guide, before I came, and worked from that, and we also commissioned a number of [\[disabled artists who also love seeing\]](#) performances, and we commissioned them to provide their



perspectives about what they would like from an arts performance. So, whether they're deaf or hard of hearing, or blind or low vision, or if they're autistic, if they are a wheelchair user, we wanted their perspective as well as mine and the Melbourne Fringe staff as well. And so, any artist that wants to make their show accessible, they have to talk with me, and we go through the guide, and I talk to them about booking Auslan interpreters or audio description -- wherever Will is, there! -- or booking for a relaxed performance, which has been great. But I think the issue is that access is often an afterthought, and so, if it's not budgeted for or if it's not thought of as a vital part of the performance, people aren't gonna have the money for it. And so, then, when I tell them that, you know, an Auslan interpreter costs between \$70 and \$220 an hour and there's a minimum of two hours, and you know, they probably need two Auslan interpreters there, and there isn't time for a rehearsal, it sometimes seems really overwhelming to them, and then they don't go ahead with that. So, I think, when they see access as just as important as the venue booking, as the communication, as the marketing, as the costumes, then it becomes a priority. Another thing I talk to people about is making sure that when they've made their show accessible, they communicate to those communities, because if no one turns up after they book an Auslan interpreter, then they'll think: "well, why did I do it, I'm not gonna want to do it in the future", but then, if they didn't communicate to the communities that they're targeting, then perhaps they didn't know about it. So, the guide talks about how to communicate to the communities, what organisations to contact. You know, for example, if you're making a show Auslan interpreted, it's really great to do a video on Facebook with Auslan interpreters talking [\[about the show, or telling a deaf audience\]](#) that you're committed to access from the get-go. In terms of setting up people to succeed who are people who are disabled to succeed, I use disabled because I am a disabled person, but if you want people with disabilities, it's fine as well, in terms of that, I think, for me at Fringe, I help people, you know, artists who are deaf or with disability to register for Fringe. I assure them that, you know, I'll help them find a venue that's accessible for them as a performer, because so much of the time it's expected that disabled people might be in the audience, so we might get an accessible venue, but never as in the performance space. So, you know, often the performance space is not accessible, so we want the performance space to be accessible for all performers. I'm doing an event here next week actually, and Emma J. Hawkins sent me through this really great piece. [Emma](#) is a performer, she's short-statured, and she said that in her time



that she's been performing, which has been about 20 years, she's never seen a performance space, so the backstage area, with an accessible bathroom. So, it's not expected that disabled people are going to be performers. The other thing that we do at Melbourne Fringe is we have mentorships. So, this year, we've selected 14 people from diverse backgrounds, eight of those places were reserved for people who are disabled or deaf, and two of the places were reserved for people from First Nations backgrounds as well. And we matched them up with mentors in the industry, and they are putting on a show this year, which is really exciting, so, giving those opportunities. So, we want to set people up to succeed. We want to provide them with the registration fee, and we want to talk about ways to make sure their show succeeds by giving them, producing mentorships with their mentor and also with Laura Milke Garner, through MILKE, and making sure that they feel safe and comfortable in a sometimes daunting world. I think, sorry, both as a person working at Fringe and outside of Fringe, is that we're not really meant to champion our success or promote what we do, promote our work. And, you know, I've experienced a tall poppy syndrome a lot as a writer, but I've also heard artists say, I didn't know that I was allowed to promote my work or share my work or tell people what's happening on social media, I don't want to get too big, I don't want to be pulled down, but I think it's really important to let artists from diverse backgrounds know that they can champion their work and tell people about it, or else how are people to know that they're gonna come, you know?

Sonya Soares:

I think that the idea of foregrounding yourself is really central to the #JustNotThatMany campaign. And so, to take up that space is the provocation to the community. [...] and this is obviously in advocacy and not in actual work, but there's something really that we found that - Alice, you said right at the beginning - that people find it really joyous. Because, yes, there is the broader provocation to the industry to say, "See, there are that many" but actually, when you find your community, dig in and make those connections, there's what I like to refer to as the penicillin of this campaign. Like, the unforeseen, wonderful benefit to the health and vitality of our sector, is that those people connect with each other and go: "oh, what's your practice? I'm super interested in that, let's make work together," and have an opportunity to foreground themselves. I think the broader point of what you were saying [Carly] before as well is about, if we acknowledge there are barriers, then making sure that there are countermeasures in the backend of work. And this goes to your point, Artie, not just like five minutes before the



work's on, but like really, really in the backend of work. One of the ideas that I think worked really well for, I guess, culturally diverse artists in Queensland was having a Diversity Associate working across three different companies, La Boite, New Media, I think it was, and Queensland Theatre, and looking at placing work, finding homes for work, digging in and finding the talent that exists in the industry. And I think you can see - I think that was like 2012 to '14 - and now, five years later, you really see the benefit that that programme had, even though it was, you know, maybe two, three years long, in terms of the artists that came through with that project. There's a long-term benefit to that community and it's something that I've been really kind of ringing a bell about in Melbourne, 'cause I think that there's scope for that here, and there's certainly demand for it here. Artie, you were talking just before we started about things like access, just things as basic as toilets, right, like in venues?

Artemis Muñoz

- Yeah, I mean, it's not even just venues like performance venues, but also rehearsal rooms and stuff. We need to think about what spaces are safe for artists and what spaces are, I guess, necessary for them to be doing their best work. This is in terms of disability access, but as a trans person, like, bathrooms are a real big thing. Even if you are a trans man or a trans woman, you might not necessarily feel comfortable using one of the two gendered toilets, and if you're a non-binary, like me, if there's no option, either you're going to be sitting there uncomfortably the whole rehearsal, being like, "yeah, okay, when's this over", or you're gonna have to walk sometimes [...] I've had rehearsals where I had to walk, like, two blocks in a 15-minute break to use a bathroom because there were no gender-neutral bathrooms around. I've been in other spaces where they've put a sign that says 'Gender-Neutral' underneath the sign where it says which gender is supposed to use the toilet, and people are just going to ignore that. It seems really simple and really easy to think about, but no one thinks about it.

Sonya Soares:

Yeah, and these are really practical measures that people can take to make people feel safe. I'm gonna just go here to Kate, I'm gonna throw my voice to Kate, [...] so if you'll afford me five minutes, I just wanna, she picks up these points. Me being Kate: "Emily Collyer's play, 'Contest', made a conscious effort to put change into practice in the rehearsal room. This production exploited some well-worn boundaries. Ours was an all-female company of creatives, technical artists, set builders, designers, choreographers and actors, and in case you're all



wondering, they were all the best person for the job. Emily wrote a beautiful, devastating piece about female friendships using netball as a metaphor that was part-poem, part-script, and then made a conscious effort to cast it inclusively. We had a breastfeeding woman, a brown-skinned woman, a blonde Celtic woman, a white every woman and a disabled woman in the cast, lovely. We invented a best-practice model, and I made the realisation that as a wheelchair user, I needed a rehearsal buddy. I figured that my NDIS package would pay for a buddy for me who could take copious notes, run lines with me, be my dresser, my personal carer, and assistant for the season. In retrospect, I needed a rehearsal buddy from day one. This would've helped with my logistical need, transferring from wheelchair to wheelchair, picking up the script I dropped, getting lunch in an inaccessible shopping strip, a paid performing artist to improvise a new specialty, and I and everybody else could concentrate on the job at hand. Instead, I had organised a disability services personal support worker to drive me to and from rehearsals, offer personal care and platitudes as needed, and get my dinner ready at night. She turned out to be a hippy born in South Yarra with a nose ring, dreadlocks, and an attitude about transgender people which came directly from her conservative upbringing. We didn't hit it off. She lasted a week. But here's the thing, because our rehearsal period had been organised differently, around our breastfeeding mother pumping every four hours and one of our actors needing her injured shoulder strapped and re-strapped, and another actor with a painful hip needing to modify some movement, me needing Wednesdays off for home access needs - we worked four days a week - we were all up for doing things differently, and it worked. Opening night came and went, reviews were written, and the production was pretty universally considered outstanding - thanks, Kate! - Even when the sound glitch stopped the first show, and not for the first time, definitely not the last. My and every rehearsal period should start with every person, disabled or not, actor or not, answering the question, "what do you need to do your best work?" Let's listen to the unique responses and act on them. That way, we would all get what we needed and our work would flourish." I know it's a long thing to read out in full, but I think it's really important. And that goes to my next little, wee provocation, which is the antithesis of that idea really, which is the idea about virtue signalling and gratitude. Kate talks on this extensively, the idea that inclusive theatre practice is some sort of favour or act of beneficence from the broader theatrical community, that they're extending to us "in diet-controlled portions." This is a big one for me, I



can bang on about this for a while, but it is for Kate too. I might just throw, before I read another Kate slab, I might just throw it to anyone else, if anyone wants to answer this idea of, like, being, or speak to this idea of being made to feel that they're being extended an act of kindness for just being in the room in the first place.

Carly Findlay:

I think it's really, if you are granted an opportunity, it can be really hard to speak up about it if it's inaccessible or doesn't meet your needs. I recently wrote a book, and I toured it for five months, and so, my publisher was amazing, but [...] So, firstly, a book tour generally goes for three weeks, and I said that's impossible, you don't get paid on a book tour either, so I didn't want to lose any money. So, I wanted to stay working at Fringe, and Fringe have been incredible, juggling my ridiculous travel requirements around my two and a half day job, two and a half day a week job, and I also didn't want to travel a lot in three weeks because it would be awful for my health. So, I did it over five months, which was good and really accommodating, and any interviews that I could do here, like in the ABC studio here, if it was in another city, that was fine. I even did one for BBC from here, it was great. I would have loved to have gone to London, but that's okay. But one of the things that I felt is that I was the one advocating for access, whether it was my access or my audience's access, and I know that the majority of my audience are gonna be disabled people. And so, I wanted to make sure they felt welcome at my launches. But I had to do the work, and I just wanted to turn up and talk. And I looked at other authors who can just turn up and talk and do. I mean, they shouldn't just turn up and talk, they should consider access, but it appears to me that no one has. And so, I was providing access information to my publishers, to bookstores, to, you know, other organisers, and it was really tiring because not only did I have to talk about the book and travel and work and all of that, I had to do the work in providing access. And one of the places that offered to host my event was a bookstore in Brisbane, and it was in March, so it was quite warm, and I don't cope well in the heat, and they wanted it to be outside. And I said no, I can't have it outside, and then they said, "Well, why don't we bring a portable air-conditioner?" I said, I don't want it outside, full stop, I want it inside, and then they said: "ah, look, it's fully accessible, but because now it'll be inside, there'll be some wheelchair users, it'll reduce the capacity of the room", and I said, uh, okay. And then they said, "Oh, and by the way, the toilet is down the road, it's only 300 metres, it's fine". And I said: would you like to use a toilet down the road? And they said "no",



and I said: “We're not having it here.” And so, I felt really awkward in having to speak up while wanting to sell my book, while trying to keep well in with the publisher and the booksellers and the venues, and that's really hard. The good thing is, when we moved it to the library in Brisbane, and my publisher said to me, or the rep said to me, she's never seen any event with so many wheelchair users at an event before. That was amazing, and we also had six people with ichthyosis in the room, and ichthyosis is like a one in a million, you know, disease or condition. So, that was amazing too, that, you know, but I don't see other authors doing that, you know, and even non-disabled performers, musicians, et cetera. It's often left up to us to do the work, and it's really hard to advocate while we're selling our product.

- Sonya Suares:** What is wonderful [...] of last night was knowing that you're gonna be having a disabled artist. You know, it just puts quite a fine line on it. You know that in advance, that's what's gonna happen, and you haven't actually--
- Alice Qin:** No, she got her stage for getting the award, it was the celebration of the arrival.
- Sonya Suares:** In the celebration, yeah. My bad.
- Alice Qin:** The actual performance that she couldn't be up there for, which is, you know, that you needed to have televised the moment that you get to give out the award there.
- Sonya Suares:** Yes.
- Alice Qin:** But in terms of, like, the virtue signalling and the [...] I think it goes hand-in-hand with the same, you know, having to overcome whatever obstacle it is that you have. It's that, that becomes the gift because you're the one with a problem. What it says is that you're not actually welcome here, but how good is it that you get to be here? And so, there are a lot of programmes and things that get run in this industry that, oftentimes, is just to tick the box. And I will happily participate and be the box-ticker for you if it means that it would afford me more opportunities, sure. But...
- Sonya Suares:** But it's a difficult, I know what you're saying, that the idea of and often they're run with the best of intentions - but it does, it creates a small



space for which very talented artists have to crawl their way through for a spot in our industry. And it can feel from our subject position that it's about optics, and I think that's very difficult. And then, once that's done, then that's kind of the bulk of the work, and we don't actually have to think about the next, I don't know, season of plays, or the next, you know... I used to make the joke about, on Australian screens, and things are getting better on our screens, but it's generally ABC and SBS leading the charge. But, you know, like, there were seven seasons of *Offspring* set in a hospital in Melbourne, and I don't know if anyone has been to a hospital in Melbourne, but it's not a white space. And I thought, if you woke up, if you actually genuinely, like, woke up in that space like needing help, you'd be quite alarmed. You'd be: "I'm for shiz on the set of *Offspring* and not in an actual hospital"! And because we had Deborah Mailman flying the flag, and there was this idea that was running around in the sort of sidebar character, we have Deborah Mailman in the first of however many series, and that's all, we've sort of ticked that box, and now we can kind of keep moving on. And I think, in about season seven, there was even the issue of representation and inclusivity came up in the storyline. And the person who was saying these words, they'd cast a white actor in that role, and I kind of wanted to stuff a pencil in my eye, 'cause it can feel like, well, you know, it's a box, as you said. It's a box-ticking exercise that's been done, and now we don't have to address the wider idea that our stages and screens reflect our society.

Artemis Muñoz:

I hate to bring up 'The Danish Girl' because no one should ever watch that film, if you haven't seen it, don't watch it, but, like, one big thing that they were, like, excusing themselves for casting this man who played this trans woman was, we've given trans people these tiny roles in the background, look, hey, we're doing a good thing, and it's like that makes up for the damage that they're causing by perpetuating this idea that trans women are men dressed up. Like, that doesn't, like, having a tiny little, like, oh, here's our box tick and we'll just do what we want to do anyway, that doesn't solve any problems.

Sonya Soares:

Kate says, yeah, I think it's a common theme across all of the various pointy intersections, but Kate would articulate it this way. She says: "Gratitude is a real problem when deaf or disabled artists are occasionally included in the making of professional mainstream theatre, not because of lack of talent, desire or ability, but because of the blank space which is created around their difference. I call this the aversion of



gaze. They will go to extraordinary lengths to fit in. Often that looks like denying their access needs. See, we disabled people have to make creative adjustments all the time in an ableist world. As a wheelchair user, it is my daily grind that I have true access only to a tiny percentage of buildings, including the workings of theatres.” And then she goes on to talk about, you know, theatres and buildings used by the performing arts are not accessible, so we circle kind of back around to that idea, but we're made to feel you need to feel grateful. And you do, it operates on you. It's a very powerful logic. And naming that can be very tricky, I think, in spaces. It can make you feel precarious, vulnerable. It creates a whole lot of emotional labour. It spikes your sympathetic nervous system, in a way, because you know that you are heading towards potential confrontation with beautiful, well-intended, well-meaning colleagues very often, and knowing that you have to be able to be incredibly articulate in this moment so that, you know, you're not written off as niche or demanding, or it impacts your next however many opportunities. So, I think that's a kind of good little segue way into language, and I'm gonna open up in a minute for all your questions. I hope you're thinking of ones 'cause I'd really love to hear from you guys in a hot second. Language, maybe can we speak to Carly, some of the work you have been undertaking in Melbourne Fringe here, specifically around how unconscious bias leaks into language.

Carly Findlay:

Yeah, sure. So, I mean, in Melbourne Fringe, we talk about, I'll read you out of our statement, you know, we talk about Melbourne Fringe being a cultural democracy and that everybody is welcome, and we want to make sure that everybody is welcome by opening up, you know, our festival up to everyone so it's an open access festival. We say that here at Melbourne Fringe, we work hard to make sure it's as accessible and inclusive to everybody as possible, and we passionately encourage all Fringe artists to do the same. After all, people with disability and deaf people want to experience art, and let's face it, you want as many people to see your art as possible. Accessible art equals 'win, win'. And it makes good sense to think about business, sorry, it makes good business sense to think about accessibility early to save costs and to save audiences from the heartache of not being able to see your amazing, brilliant, jaw-droppingly incredible festival show. When access requirements are met, it says, everybody is welcome. So, yeah, in terms of language [...] Preparation, I guess, for volunteers, and also for festival staff, I was talking about, you know, the language they should use around people with disability. So, as you know, with my Fringe hat on,



we use people with disability, and deaf or hard of hearing people. I call myself a disabled person and that's led by me, and that's okay to call myself a disabled person because I identify like that. And I also was in touch with Switchboard, which do some really great work around the LGBTIQA+ space and we talked about inclusive language for trans people as well, and we made gender-neutral bathrooms at all of the Fringe-operated venues, which is really important to us. But, yeah--

Sonya Suares: Yeah, I might throw to Artie on that if that's okay, Carly, just to talk about best practice in language in rehearsal rooms at the beginning of work or meetings, and why that's important.

Artemis Muñoz: Yeah, I mean, I think some of the biggest barriers that trans people have to face in creating art is having to advocate when people mess up, and it's a thing that's gonna happen, unfortunately, a lot, especially if you're using pronouns that people aren't as used to, if you're using they/them pronouns or neopronouns. For those who don't know what that means, I forget that I live in my tiny little trans bubble. They are pronouns like xe/xem/xyr, or ve/ver, stuff like that. People are going to mess up, but it shouldn't, if you, by default, don't even make that a thing you consider and you ask about at the beginning of the process, I think you're setting everyone up to fail multiple times. So, it would be best practice if the first time everyone meets, you say, "Hi!" if one in your cast is trans, you might have someone who uses two sets of pronouns, someone that you are accidentally...

Sonya Suares: Mis-gendering.

Artemis Muñoz: Yeah, and you have no idea about it, things like how people want to be referred to in reviews and outward-facing media versus how they want to be referred to in a rehearsal room. There can be a difference there, and that's something we need to be talking about from quite early on so that everyone feels comfortable and safe.

Sonya Suares: At this point, I might open up 'cause I want to kind of bring us back to the end of--

Carly Findlay: I had just one thing more to say, sorry.

Sonya Suares: Yeah, go on, jump in.



Carly Findlay: In our guide as well, I talked about inclusive language around disability and how important it is to get language right, not only when you're working with artists, but in your performance, like if you're going to be using derogatory words like the R word or the M word, then, you know, get cleverer because it's not right to punch down to use those words. So, I've got some examples of ableist language, and I've also talked about the reclamation of slurs by disabled people as well, like how sometimes we call ourselves crips, which is okay, you know, too. But, yeah, I think it's really important to set that tone and to make it a really safe space.

Sonya Soares: Kate mentioned that even in the context where everybody is really conscious, sometimes it just leaks into, because everybody carries unconscious bias, and to try to deny that is like a weird psychological manoeuvre, I think. But, you know, even in a really conscious space, the use of the word *lame* is derogatory. It came into the lexicon a couple of times, like, "this soundtrack is lame". It's like a really interesting thing that came out of a space where everybody's making an incredible conscious effort, and yet that's the descriptor that you've decided to use in the presence of a wheelchair using artist, and so, checking that, I think, and we can always do better with that. I will now, just because I'm really conscious [re: time...] to talk about for days, but I'm sure that you guys have things to talk about, open up for some questions on any of these, along any of these lines: language, privilege, best practice in our rehearsal rooms, stages. If people want to ask questions around experiences, or want to give some examples of their own experience into the room, it will be really great to hear from you.

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Nup, we've covered it all.

Carly Findlay: I think, in terms of the disability space, there always has to be a backstory about why. Someone needs to say, well, how they got like this.

Audience Member: Yeah, yeah.

Carly Findlay: And there has to be a tragedy that they're overcoming as a character, and disability can't be, you know, it can't be incidental. I know, so, sometimes I've performed my writing, and I did a performance at the



Melbourne Writers Festival a few years ago, which was around all the invasive questions that I have been asked, which was prior to that ABC interview, so might have to make an edit to that performance. And then, afterwards, there was a guy that came up to me, and I talked about the damage of these questions on me and on my self-worth, and how I didn't really think my body was lovable because it was so medicalized by both medical professionals and strangers, and afterwards, this man came up to me, and he just started talking to me about how oppressed I am and how, you know, like asking me all the questions that I'd been talking about. It was really interesting that, like, my body was [...] Another time, I was on stage, doing a panel like this at a Women's Day event, and afterwards, I had a drink, and a woman comes up to me, and I'm gonna touch you now, if that's okay, and she just starts scratching my arm like this, and she says, "oh, do you need a scratch?" 'cause she saw me scratching. She got so familiar with my itchiness that she wanted to give me a scratch, and I said, no, thanks, I don't know you and that's really weird. And then she left, and the people that organised the event were so horrified by it. It was a really odd situation, that she found my body to be her body.

Sonya Soares:

And accessible to her. I mean, I wonder about that, like, you know, when you mentioned that, the corollary of that idea is we're releasing our, what is it, three productions of West Side Story going on this year, yeah? And I think, I don't know, in the performance history of West Side Story in Australia, it's just super interesting, isn't it? We've just never really... I think there's one touring production that've cast, now, a brown Maria, but we're very, very okay – we? - *others* are very, very okay with seeing and imagining into that space of Maria's ethnicity. I mean, the whole dramatic line of West Side Story, for those who don't know, it's about gang violence, and what makes that 1950s musical relevant today is precisely that we have politicians playing political football with, like, migrant communities to this day, like the South Sudanese community who are just criminalised. And so, if you're going to stage a musical that's from the '50s, West Side Story, which takes a central tenant of racial violence, and you're gonna stage it in Australia now, I would think speaking to that is like the guts of the work. And we're very happy to erase that out and project into it, in this really weird psychological manoeuvre, but I think it's the inverse, somehow, of what you were just describing. And that often gets referred to, this talks about, this is the language that grinds my gears, this gets referred to as 'colour-blind casting'. I just think it's whitewashing, isn't it?



Audience Member: Oh, absolutely. It only ever works one way.

Sonya Suares: It's like: "well, I don't see race". Tsk! Yes, you do. I mean, you know, but what we're actually going for, I think what we're trying to talk about is 'colour-conscious casting', that when you put someone in, they're not a blank space. They actually, they read out, and they read a whole lot of richness into your work, they speak to their communities, they engage. As you say, suddenly whole segments of the community come out of the woodwork and say, "this is a story about me". We've seen 'Crazy Rich Asians', like, this is the Box Office question, right? So, like, I don't know--

Alice Qin: Well, there's that, but also I wonder, I always wonder, why do we relegate all of our diversity in our education programming. Like on TV and in all our theatres, we have such a plethora of just like beautiful stories, you know, like all of the issues that get brought up because we know consciously that that is the type of narratives that we want to teach our children, but then the moment they turn 18, oh, sorry, this space is not for you anymore. It becomes a risky choice, and I can never figure that one out.

Sonya Suares: And I don't know that it is really true of Box Office, I mean, we can all point to, like, 'Hamilton' and, like, 'Crazy Rich Asians', you know, where those, those projects are a Box Office smash hit success. I've worked for Jeremy in the Education Season at MTC, and we can talk about the different pressures that operate on theatres and reaching those communities, 'cause obviously we don't just cast something and throw open the doors, and the entire community comes running in, they have to know it's on. So, one of the things that we did with 'Melbourne Talam' was actually putting - and this was, I mean, this was my provocation to Jezza on day one of rehearsal, but to his credit, that whole department took it up and then put the three of us, 'Melbourne Talam' was an Indian Australian story, and created a poster that then spoke to a community. And very often, Sahil, Rohan and I would come out after the show, it was a largely education audience, but then we would see people and I would assume it was like one of Rohan or one of Sahil's [\[aunties ...\]](#) and suddenly something on the MTC, on that building, which maybe doesn't speak to them a whole of the time, spoke to them. And the next year, the 'Hungry Ghosts' girls were on the poster, and now Jing Xuan is on, like, the cover of the MTC programme, which I think, like, when you look at the programme, like, from 2018,



who was on the cover of the programme to who's on the cover of the programme now, I think that's huge, you know? And it comes through advocacy, and it comes through allies and having people in the backend who are willing to kind of go, yeah, I see that, and we will continue that. You know, it was a long discussion, I think the discussion actually started the year before that with Janine and I and Bali Padda, who was the head of the Equity Diversity Committee, with respect to the 'Disgraced' collateral, and so, through a long-form conversation, you can create change and people may come running into the theatre. But, yeah, I mean, I take your point about education as well, it's this idea that, like, we want to present the world as it could be or it should be to our children, but why not to the rest of us. Because I think I go to the theatre to imagine different worlds. Did anyone else have a question? Just snapped, I'm just talking again. Any Dorothy Dixers in the corner? Natasha, you got anything that you want to lob in? I can read stuff from Kate, if that helps.

Artemis Muñoz:

I mean, if we don't have any questions, I just had this thought that I would like to share with you all about what it's sort of like living at the intersections of a few different identities, 'cause I've been up here talking about my experience as a non-binary trans person, and I very often am put in this type of advocacy situation in that respect, which means that I'm not as connected with other parts of my identity, which are probably equally as important. Like I never talk about, like, being mixed race, you know, I'm part Latin America and I'm part Mediterranean, and I never get to talk about, you know, being neurodivergent and stuff like that, but you're all very much a part of me and more characters that are just, you know, not just the one token, diverse person, but capture the richness of what people are actually like, because I know that I'm not the only one out there who lives at a few of these intersections, there are so many.

Sonya Soares:

Kate makes that point. She says that, you know, disability runs through all. It's an intersectional issue, there are, you know, people of colour with disability, there are trans people with disability, there are gender-diverse people with disability. You know, being made to stand in for one facet of your identity is the definition of dehumanising, you know. It's very disempowering after a point because, again, going back to America Ferrera. We posted on our channels a little TED Talk from America Ferrera talking about how she was made to see her identity as an obstacle. She was the actress in 'Ugly Betty', and she went through a



number of casting processes, and she'd be asked to make the character more Hispanic, which was like a by-word for just, you know, more illiterate or poorer, you know, it was a kind of standing for class, and the message, the subconscious message of that is that, in order to succeed, I have to suppress, it was what you're saying, I have to suppress this part or leap over it to show how amazingly - like old mate that your drama teacher was - you know, like, exceptional I am in order to work in my chosen field. And then this TED Talk goes all the way around to the idea that actually only by embracing my identity as a superpower did I find richness in it, because I think we all come to it, and going right back to Welcome to Country, we're here to tell stories. There's a severing, there's almost like a parallel to what bell hooks describes that patriarchy does to men, you know, who are asked to - she talks about the first violence of the patriarchy that [\[men who\]](#) don't subscribe to, you know, the masculine [\[have to cut out those non-conforming parts of themselves...\]](#) and if they're not willing to do it, then there's other men who will brutalise them and do it for them. And that's the first requirement of the patriarchy, you know, in gender roles. And I think there's a version of that that happens to us as artists being made to stand in very tight parameters as various others and not being able to speak from within our lived experience. So, intersectionality? Is that something like, I mean, you know, are there artists in the room, is that a kind of provocation that people are interested to explore, or do we want to kind of lean into what can we do, practical things we can do? Yeah, all right. All right, Kate's got a motser here, I've got pages from Kate on this. So, I'm just gonna start with her and then I'm gonna go across to you guys, all right? Kate had, hot second while I said, where to now? Kate says: "Quotas and disability action plans and best practice models and my ideal world. And so, with our disability action plans, we need to give our industry the capacity to be inclusive. Many of our professionals within the performing arts have no idea where to start as far as disability goes; therefore, they do nothing". And I guess it's why the literature that you provided today is, like, so incredibly beneficial, and I think that this is kind of, this is a broader point that goes across all the different lines. Actually, there's a lot of work and labour and resources that are out there, it's sort of about looking for them.

Carly Findlay:

Just make a start, like, you don't have to do everything. Doing something is better than doing nothing.



Sonya Soares:

Yeah, and she would say: "We end up with an industry full of good people who make no change." So, A, make a start, as Carly says, and B: "I'd like to see a funding model that sees the making of disability action plans mandatory for institutions like MEAA," - that's Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance - "for example, that cannot possibly represent the needs of artists with disability until it does adapt. Quotas, this is a great difference between the UK and Australia, is that there was a change in law requiring all businesses to employ a quota of people with a disability, and I think that discrimination legislation [...] put in. And she gives a best practice model of St. Martin's Theatre, so I might read this. "St. Martin's model of inclusion is a really great case study. In short, at one point, St. Martin's was made up of kids and young adults who were neurotypical and able-bodied virtually across the board. While Trevor Matthews was there, more and more kids with access requirements were joining. St. Martin's was open to it and kept saying, yes, yes, yes to all these diverse kids and young adults, but Trevor Matthews quickly realised that they couldn't just keep saying yes while making no actual organisational changes, so he looked for best practice access models across theatre companies in Australia. He didn't find any, and then he looked outside the sector. He ended up looking into a model provided by local councils, each of which had a metro access officer. He decided to implement a similar role at St. Martin's." I think, and she goes on to say: "He got Katrine Gabb, whose experience was on council, and her job was essentially to sit in every meeting room, et cetera, and say, what about access? And the role became a permanent position at St. Martin's. It's now called the Inclusion Coordinator, and it's an integrated role across the whole company "and is a part of the key artistic process, and Tom Middleditch currently holds that role." And in her ideal world: there would be "a level playing field within our profession. We would see people with disability studying at drama schools, that's a huge one because they're often excluded outright in drama schools, writing for television, directing for stage and film. It would be commonplace for the Australian public to see actors who were genuinely disabled on our stages and television screens and in our films. They would be in demand and adding dimension to classic and contemporary performance work. Disabled actors would be auditioning for roles alongside able-bodied actors, the office worker, the neighbour, the prisoner, the politician, the psychiatrist, the brother, the songwriter, and would be judged on the quality of their audition, just like able-bodied actors they studied with at drama school." I might hand over to



you, Alice, for the provocation of, like, what would you, 'cause that kind of goes to, yeah.

Alice Qin: Yeah. Well, you know, like doing the work of actually seeing what talent is out there, letting people tell their stories, and also opening up the casting wider, I think. I do Equity Day [...] where there's one day for every audition, where you set aside for anyone with an MEAA membership, with an Equity membership, that they can, you know, just throwing aside your preconceived notion of what the part should be for, you know, just a section of time so that you can see what else there is available. And also, sorry, I'm just having a little mental breakdown moment.

Sonya Soares: Is it about, the other thing being about creating positions behind our stages.

Alice Qin: Absolutely, yeah, yeah. Having champions.

Sonya Soares: Creating champions.

Alice Qin: And creating champions.

Sonya Soares: This is an idea we've been kicking around at the Equity Diversity Committee, so we're like, let's lop it into space. We'll play it when we get to this panel, but we like the idea of, you know, there's this labour involved in all of this, this incredible, incredible amount of labour that people, it's sort of expected, if you care about it, that you'll just voluntary do, and it's all time away from our practice and filling our well, and we do it when we're sick, and we do it, you know, in times of tragedy. You know, Kate's written pages and pages while she's up in Central Victoria, and, you know, not having to do that into space on your own in this model of gratitude, where you're kind of banging on the door from the outside asking for crumbs, but that we actually create people within the institutions, because I just don't think all white or all able-bodied, you know, or all buildings full of gender binary, white, able-bodied men are necessarily gonna make the same change as if we actually include people like Kate's describing as inclusion officers, advocates, champions.

Artemis Muñoz: Yeah.



Sonya Soares: Yeah. Your turn.

Artemis Muñoz: Oh, well, help, what changes do I need to see? But talking from a specifically transgender, diverse, non-binary perspective, the big thing is how. As a performer, the big thing is how casting is done in this country, in show cast, and not be a man or a woman, or not misgender yourself. It's not possible, and you're paying to have that profile. That's just huge. Every role that's written, you advertise, okay, well, we need a woman to play this part and a man to play this part. I, to get in the room, have to basically pretend to be someone I'm not to even be seen for either of those characters even though that might be something well within my scope to play, and it's not because I'm trying to take space from people who are one of those binary genders. There are so many of us who are just completely locked out of the room because of how we're setting up this system. I don't think, when we're casting, like you said, if you make a decision on what gender is playing this role and what race is playing this role and what ability this person has to have before you even let people in the room, you're really doing a disservice to what the story could be telling.

Sonya Soares: Is that even before you even get to casting, is that even about how we write and conceive of stories as well? Because I know, like, now there's this, most playwrights will write new Australian work through the advocacy of organisations like the EDC, and will say, we encourage casting directors and directors to cross-racially cast or seek out culturally diverse artists in, you know, casting this play. There was a phrase that you used about, we are determining the actor, not the character, like we're fixing in these scripts in the way that we advertise their characteristics first, we fix gender and age, and that's actually not necessarily intrinsic to character. Sometimes it is.

Artemis Muñoz: Yeah.

Sonya Soares: But if it's not, is there a way of conceiving it right?

Artemis Muñoz: Yeah, for sure, I mean, that would be amazing, if most [...] behind producing a work, directing a work, to find the right people regardless of gender, and we don't want that to turn into, you know, locking people out of roles that are meant to be for specific identity groups. Like, that's not what I'm advocating for at all, but it's just like, if you've got a police person, like, why do they have to be policeman, now, done, and we



never think about it again? It's not necessary, and it does a great disservice, I think, not just to the people who could be holding those roles and filling them and telling great stories through them, but also to the audiences.

Sonya Soares: Yeah, it's a great point.

Artemis Muñoz: And, like, I think that that's just the biggest thing that I would like to see change in the industry. I know that's not a simple change, that's huge, structural change.

Sonya Soares: I'm a structuralist. I think you've got to go for those huge, structural changes.

Artemis Muñoz: But, yeah. Like, I think it's so integral to sort of, to challenging the way stories are told and making sure that they are more authentically reflecting the society we live in, the world we live in, yeah.

Sonya Soares: Carly?

Carly Findlay: Yeah, I think it comes down to in the writing room and authentic writing, authentic stories, getting disabled people in the writing room. I mean, Jess Walton did a really great job on writing "Get Krackin", the disability episode, but again, like, there shouldn't just be a disability episode, it should be disability across the season. I think that we also, as performers, writers, artists, we have to make really good decisions about how we're representing our community as well, and I guess, from a media perspective, I see so many people that are disabled or have ichthyosis do really poor media, and that can really damage the way we're perceived. So, you know, do a bit of research around the media you're doing, do a bit of research around the script. Like you were saying, Artie, sometimes you've done things that've been awkward. I pitched a show to Melbourne Fashion Week and it got in, and I did it because we don't see any disabled people in Fashion Week. Interestingly, it got so much media coverage, it got maybe 18 articles and stories, maybe 20, including the New York Times, BuzzFeed, the ABC. Melbourne Fashion Week didn't cover it on their own social media channels. So, they gave us a place, but they didn't show that we were valued or that they were proud to have us because they admitted that, which is really disappointing. But, yeah, I mean, I think it comes down to us needing to create what isn't there, and that can be really hard



because sometimes we just want to get in and do the work. Also, be really good allies and step up, and say, who's not in the room? Invite those who aren't in the room into the room. Make sure your events are accessible from the start, yeah.

Sonya Soares:

Yeah, I think that idea of, it's a failure of imagination, creating this space, or refusing to create this space is a failure of imagination, in an art form, it's about creativity and imagination. I wrote my thoughts down, so I'm gonna have to go to my laptop here. I think, just a last idea, adding to all of that, is rigour. I think, too often at the moment, this issue is seen through the lens of woke, left-leaning practitioners who've decided that they're already across the issue. Have I already told this or did I just do this in rehearsal? I haven't told this story.

Alice Qin:

No.

Sonya Soares:

Okay, I'll tell it. So, you know, I could quote you half a dozen pearlys, but my all-time favourite was a key executive at a major performing arts organisation, countering a modest approach from a number of us at the Equity Diversity Committee to address some rather unfortunate commentary that'd come out of the building with a flat statement: "I understand diversity, I'm gay." You know, and I just think, me for mine - I'm a heterosexual woman. At that time, there was no marriage equality. I have the benefit of being able to marry my partner, I have children. I would never purport to speak on behalf of [\[the LGBTQIA+ community. So perhaps at this point, don't decide you already understand the issue. Think about\]](#) how we can individually and collectively do better, please listen, and I think that this is such joy, for me, anyway, and the people who are in the room today doing the listening. And I know who's not. It's super important, like, don't assume that you already know. If we were so thoroughly across all of this, we would not be having to be inventing new ways, like the #JustNotThatMany Campaign, inventing new ways to protest. Tim had asked me, when we were talking about Tim Stitz over there, who co-programmed this with Natasha Phillips, he was like: "Okay, so, you know, when we get to, like, what can we do? What can we actually do? Tangible things?" And I was like: well, we can give a lot of provocations, but obviously, like, I mean, if I could solve this on my own, it would be already sorted, guys, like, for sure, for shiz. We can't individually do it, but we can collectively listen. We can all do our little parts of the puzzle. If you can't do all of it, start some of it. We are meant to be the critical



thinkers and leaders, so we need to engage our critical faculties. Look around for the resources that already exist. Look around for the artists that, as Rachel Chavkin, who accepted an award last night at the Tony's, said, you know, women, people of colour, artists with a disability, they are poised and ready to be given space to flourish, this is not a pipeline issue. So, if you have the capacity to create space at the backend of productions as well as on the stages of the productions, if you have a capacity to further that, then we invite you to continue to do so because there are just, #JustSoMany of us raring to go. Any last questions, comments, statements? Jamie, nothing, no? Okay, thank you very much for coming, guys, and for your attention.