**Paul**

Hello, everyone and welcome to Middle Child Make Theatre, our new podcast about the nuts and bolts of making theatre and running a company. I'm Paul Smith, the artistic director, and every month I'll be chatting with one of our collaborators to get into the minutiae of theatre, demystifying how theatre is made across all areas. Our first podcast guest is the award-winning writer and star of The Canary and the Crow, Daniel Ward. Dan, thanks for joining us.

**Daniel**

Hello. Yeah. Thanks for having me. Cool, man. Nice. Nice thing you doing? Nice to be the first guest.

**Paul**

Yeah, we're really excited. How you doing? How's things going?

**Daniel**

Yeah, not bad. Not bad. It's like the first time the sun started shining, really? The past few days. And that’s really set the cat amongst the pigeons, is nice, man. It's lovely. But personally, I'm alright man. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Can't complain at all.

**Paul**

Great. Well, it's really good to hear from you. And I'm looking forward to chatting about all things writing and acting. And we've got some great listener questions that we’ll come to a little bit later. But yeah, honoured to have you as our first guest man, I'm looking forward to getting started. So to kick us off, I wonder if you could just tell us a little bit about how you got into theatre?

**Daniel**

Kind of stumbled into it a little bit, I guess. When I was at school, there was no drama lessons or drama classes. So if you wanted to do drama, it was like a separate club. And that went back to something like the 1970s, when they wanted to do a production of T'is A Pity She's a Whore or something like that. And then the parents were outraged or whatever. So the drama department was like associated with the school. But it wasn't like a lesson or anything. Anyway, I was doing drama at school in this kind of drama department and I enjoyed it. And then they told me to go to the National Youth Theatre. And I didn't really know too much about National Theatre by when I left the National Youth Theatre, they kind of told me to go to drama school. And I thought yeah, it was at a point in my life when I didn't really have like a definite direction. But I knew I really enjoyed acting, I enjoyed theatre. And so I was just kind of going with my gut, really? And I auditioned for drama school. And yeah, got in, got into LAMDA. And so yeah, that was how I kind of started.

**Paul**

And just to bookend this intro, how would you describe where you're at in your career at this moment?

**Daniel**

Um, I guess it's a horrible like word innit, that emerging, that kind of word which kind of sums up, they kind of use to sum up anybody, at any stage of their career, but I don't really know how to, yeah, define that. I was very fortunate with Canary and the Crow, we picked up a lot of awards, and it's opened up a lot of conversations, and I'm talking to lots of different people about projects. And there's lots of stuff on the table. But, yeah, it's not necessarily fully fledged yet. So I guess I'm, yeah, I'm emerging. But I don't like that word, I really don't. Because I kind of feel like it's a bit of a buzzword, and they kind of use it for you at any stage of your career. Yeah.

**Paul**

Yeah. When do you stop emerging?

**Daniel**

Yeah, I don't know. I don't know. But I guess that's what I'd be.

**Paul**

And where are you at? In terms of how do you define yourself at the moment as a writer, as an actor, as a bit of both?

**Daniel**

Oh, yeah, I just yeah, I say I'm an actor and a writer. I don't think I ever changed. I think I always say that.

**Paul**

Yeah, great. Well, if we can just start by sort of zooming into the writing aspect of what you do, and then we'll come round later and talk a bit more about acting. But if we can just start with writing, just interested to kick us off. Why do you write?

**Daniel**

I think, for me, writing is a bit of a compulsion, is a bit of a way for me to process things I'm thinking or feeling or seeing. And to put it into a form that's entertaining. You know, you see stuff that goes on in the world and then you go, Okay, I want to write something. There's always a reason why I write something. And some of those times, sometimes those reasons are kind of really grand and noble. And sometimes they're just like, I just want to chill out. I just wanna laugh. I just want to, I just want to have fun, which, in some ways, I guess, is just as grand and noble as like the more kind of traditionally worthy like, ideas. Because people need to chill out, people need to laugh, people need to have fun. So I kind of write to process, the way I feel about things. And the way I feel at the moment and the way I feel about the world. That's what I'd say.

**Paul**

And having trained as an actor, has that compulsion grown or changed, or was that was that always there? And did you have to suppress that as an actor?

**Daniel**

I think it's slightly different. I don't think I've ever suppressed it as an actor. I think as an actor, you have to intuit other people's stories as best you can. And as a writer, you tell the stories as best you can. Because I think even when I was acting, I was always writing things here and there. Even if what I wasn't doing was finishing stuff. That's a whole n’other thing. But, you know, I was starting stories and then putting them down. And I always had kind of ideas about, yeah, stuff that was interesting to me. So, I guess, yeah, I never really suppressed anything, because I was doing both. All the time, even if kind of like, you know, no one was really paying attention to the writing bit. Like I was always kind of, yeah, messing about with it.

**Paul**

Yeah, I'm interested in, obviously, with this podcast, we're trying to really kind of zoom in and talk about the kind of nitty gritty of what it is to do these things that we do within theatre. So I wonder if you could you just talk us through actually, in sort of quite a lot of detail, what your process is? And I guess maybe the opening question within that is, you know, where do you start? And what does a day writing look like?

**Daniel**

That's dependent on a number of things. I guess, if we're talking about when do I start, if we're talking about an original idea? Like, straight off the bat, it starts with a compulsion. And I always start with the question why? And it's simply like, why am I writing this? Like I said, those whys can be like, I want to have fun, I want to chill out. And then, you know, that's what I want for other people. I want people to have fun. Or it can be like, my why can be because I don't know, the government said that there's no institutional racism in the UK in a report and I want to address it.

Like, it could be, it could be, it could be something like that. But there's always a reason that makes me want to kind of start a story and an impetus to go, and some of those are quite, yeah, like I said, some of them are quite more serious than others in whatever, wherever context, that means anyway. But if I've already got that story, have already started, then it just becomes about, yeah, I guess discipline, but really not. It's just like, I quite enjoy getting those thoughts out creatively. And then the why informs the how, that's what I'd say: I think about why I'm doing it. And then how.

**Paul**

Are you someone who does a lot of planning or do you do you follow that compulsion instinctively?

**Daniel**

That's what I mean. It's all in form. Like, I think that's entirely subjective, down to the project, like those two examples that I just gave right. If I seriously was gonna write a piece, and I'm only talking about the UK is institutional literally came out yesterday, I don't know when this podcast going to be on but. So it's, it's in the world at the moment. But if I was going to sit down and think, Oh, I want to creatively explore a response to that, then I would have to sit down and really read it, really understand what they've said. And then understand how I would make a creative response to it. I know why I'm doing it because I don't agree with it. But yeah, if I'm thinking, you know, I just want to chill out and vibe, like why do I want to chill out and vibe? And then how, you know, that can be a more more instinctive approach, based on an exploration of form and exploration of the way I want people to feel when they come into the space the way I want. Yeah, the audience to feel during the piece, you know? And then I can go with that without a definitive kind of structure or store like, no, without a definitive structure without a lot of research without a lot of prep. If I'm talking about something that's kind of, you know, a real solid thing, then that also informs my process, I guess. I can't just, you know, make it up. I have to know what I'm talking about.

**Paul**

Can you just paint a picture for us? So you know, you've got a day's writing ahead. What does that look like? Where are you? Where does that happen? What's in the background? Is it quiet? Is it noisy? You just paint a bit of a picture for like, what, actually the active work of writing is for you?

**Daniel**

Yeah, it's okay, I sit down on my computer. And I'll open up the thing that I'm going to open up, and then I'll start. And then I'll get distracted. And then I'll go and make a sandwich. And then I'll think about the thing that I'm trying to work on, then I'll come back, then I'll get distracted again, by something on my phone. And then I'll sit down, mess about for a bit, think more. And then start. But the thing is, like, for me, I never like stuff like that. I say that kind of flippantly but stuff like that is is important, because I really think about what I'm doing. Now when I actually get into it like I can just, when I actually kind of get into writing something I can just go. I can just keep on writing it. Like I said for me, right? It's a bit of a compulsion. Kind of when I understand my characters, when I know who they are, when I know why they're saying what they're saying, why they're feeling what they're feeling, I can I can really kind of yeah, write that, that's quite easy. Often the start is the hardest thing for me. But I think like, I think that it's about who you are as a person as well, I know Richard Gadd, I've heard Richard Gadd talk about the way he writes on a similar podcast where he was saying he gets up and he starts writing at 9 in the morning and finishes writing at 5pm because he thinks if most people can do a 9-5then so can he. And I think that's an incredible way to do but no, that wouldn't work for me, like, you know, like something and like, I couldn't sit down. Stuff triggers thoughts from outside from the world triggers thoughts, so I quite like looking out into the world to see what's going on and to engage with it in order to inform my art.

**Paul**

And and can you force yourself to write if you've, you know, say, it's Sunday night, and you think, right, tomorrow, I'm going to get up and the deadline approach on Friday, I'm going to smash it out, I'm going to get there. And then you wake up and you're not feeling it. Like are you able to sort of force yourself into that place? Or is it for you, is it about the mood being right, and just sort of that that kind of natural feeling of being able to write now?

**Daniel**

100% 100% I'm able to, like at the end of the day, like I need to sit down and I need to go write and then I can just focus some times, when I do that when I've got deadline approaching and I get more focused and I don't get up and procrastinate and, you know, because you know like anything I think I want the stuff that I do to be good. I really care about the stuff that I write. So yeah, I think yeah, I just, I just focus and I go with it, if I have to.

**Paul**

And just on that question of, you know, you want it to be good. How do you know when it's good, when you're sat there writing and you're on your own in that space? Can you tell when it's good? And what helps you to make that judgment?

**Daniel**

If I'm laughing along. If I’m like, Oh, yeah, this is funny. But then, yeah, I think that's the work of writing. I think, first of all, it's not going to be good. This is like, this is one of the things that people kind of, say, like, Don't put too much pressure on yourself, for that first draft to be good, it will be rubbish, get through it. And I do believe that in a lot of ways, like, you just write, right, just write what you have to. Don't put too much pressure on yourself for it to be perfect, because when you finished it, then you can really go back and really start kind of breaking it down and stuff. And like I think it's just really focusing on, for me, that question again, why? Why is that character saying something, why is this scene important? You have to know why a scene exists, you have to know why people are saying something, you have to know what the stakes are. How you represent that doesn't always have to be really obvious. Like, I give this example, because it's quite an easily accessible one: if you know your character has a problem, you know, with alcohol or whatever, you don't need to say I have a problem with alcohol, you can just have them have quite a few drinks, throughout your production, do you know what I mean, it's that kind of thing.

But I think you know it’s good when it kind of flows a bit, when one things goes into another, when it feels kind of smooth and that’s the point at which you need other people to come in and go. Yeah, no, this bit is not good. This bit, whatever. Yeah.

**Paul**

And is that early process quite solo for you? Or will you include friends, family, your partner? Will people sort of outside of the industry, for example, see some of this early stuff, or hear some of these early ideas?

**Daniel**

I think, yeah, they'll hear the early ideas, but I never really seed the early work or hear like, stuff that's that I've written read out. But they'll definitely hear the early ideas, but, they'll be like, this is what I'm writing about. But I kind of think, when I sit in the room, and I kind of bang it out.

And then at a point at which is kind of finished, that's when people can hear it. But again all of this stuff is subjective. I’m sure there are people who write something and go to their partners and read it out loud and stuff but I don’t. My girlfriend, she works you know. She won't want to come back and listen to my ramblings, I'm sure so.

**Paul**

And so what is the point that you share? Even you know, with the industry, when do you send your work to somebody? When do you say this is ready for someone else to look at now,

**Daniel**

I think that depends on who you're sending it to a little bit. Like, if it's for a competition or whatever, sometimes you feel like that's got to be in a place that's maybe more advanced than if you're just sending it to your mates, you know, I mean, like for me those are two different things. If I’ve read it a hundred times or whatever and I kind of feel like, you can always just change things constantly but then you get to a place where the adjustments are less and you feel we can run with this, then you send it out your first point of calls, or if you’re comfortable with your idea and your script, send it in to the literary manager or competition or whatever its is that you think could be good fit for the story that you're trying to tell.

**Paul**

And when you you know, when you finally do send that to let's say you've you've submitted your first draft, how does that feel like? What's your? What's your overriding feeling when you click that send button?

**Daniel**

Such an interesting question. I don't know, I don't really dwell on it. I really don't. Like I think I have a reaction when I like, hear it for the first time out loud and stuff like that. And I think I have a reaction when, if you know if something gets staged or put on, I definitely have a reaction to it. But when I kind of submit, I kind of feel that boom, it's there done and I just let go. And wait for the world to see what you know, world to come back to me on it. But I don’t. Yeah, don't dwell on that, on that one that send button really.

**Paul**

And then I guess the next phase of that with theatre is often that then somebody will send you some thoughts and send you some opinions? And could you talk a bit about about what that's like to sit and create something that you know, comes from your head and you put onto some pages and then suddenly to have have these notes? How does that notes process feel?

**Daniel**

It feels good, if it's good. I think often it's kind of… I like first of all I like I like cuts and I like I'm a bit weird. I like concision in my writing. So if there's something that could be said in a few words, that I've overwritten, I'm always happy for those kinds of notes, sometimes. And dramaturlogical advice about kind of structure in stuff and story beats is always, always welcome. I think, you know, people have really hard jobs when it comes to writing and feedback, and I appreciate it, I appreciate the time and effort and people kind of put in. I think everybody's also, I think everybody's always going to have preferences or biases towards the work that they like and if I’m presenting something that kind of goes against a traditional type of form or traditional type of structure or, I don’t know… One of the one of the issues I had with Canary when I was sending out was people were telling me that it was too short. But I was trying to tell them, there's so much music in this and you haven't allowed the space for the music. And the music would make it a lot longer. So people were looking at, you know, word count, rather than but I planned certain bits in, in the play to have song with it. So I knew that they were longer than the word count, if that makes sense? So I think that was one of the, you know, one of the slight barriers I had with that. But it’s being open, and really appreciating that advice, but also understanding that sometimes people might not get your worldview, especially if you’re talking about something very specific. So it’s a balancing act, definitely because you really have to take and listen and intuit that kind of advice, but also some people just might not get what you’ve done. And there are so many examples of fantastic work that’s taken so long to pout on and so many people didn’t get, I think the Queen’s Gambit on Netflix took 30 years or something like that. And I think that kind of navigating that the skill that you have to kind of learn.

**Paul**

Is that something that you feel empowered within that process to agree with notes, disagree with notes, take some on board and leave some behind? Like generally, do you feel like you know, you're able to be empowered within your response to that to notes?

**Daniel**

Yeah, definitely. Definitely. And for me, it goes right back to what I said, which was, I know why I'm writing it. I know why I'm writing it, I know who I'm writing it for. So if, you know, if a note kind of doesn't kind of get that, then I can go OK that’s fine you don't get that. It ry and be specific as I can to the world I’m writing about and serving. If that world isn't accessible to the person giving me feedback and they don't get it, that’s fine too Do you know what I mean like, but I know why I'm doing it and I know the people I want to are gonna get it. If I'm writing something about Hull and I write I don't know, a line about chip spice, you know, I mean, like someone in London ain't gonna ain't gonna bang for them. I mean, like, but -

**Paul**

Whereas here it's gonna fly that line.

**Daniel**

Yeah, exactly. Exactly. And it's kind of understanding that you're not I mean, like, it's kind of understanding, you know, someone in London is gonna go, whatever that is, but knowing that your audience and who you're writing for is gonna gonna feel that.

**Paul**

Morley's was the -

**Daniel**

Yeah, yeah. Morley’s was the in thing. So that’s in Canary. I had so many people coming up to me, because Canary’s, it's set - it's quite deliberately, that there's not very many very specific references, and one of the only ones is Morley’s. So people really grabbed on to that yeah.

**Paul**

I remember people heading up to you afterwards. And oh, my God, you mentioned Morley’s.

**Daniel**

Yeah, yeah,

**Paul**

Okay, cool. So what's that redrafting process like? So you've shared it with the world? you've you've got some thoughts and some opinions to take or leave. And then what's what's it like to sit back down again, with that same document and a bit of time and a bit more input in between. How’d you find the redrafting process? And how do you do that?

**Daniel**

Cool, man, I find it cool. I really do. I like I like cutting I like concision, like I said I like that's the kind of work part of it, you know, because once you've written the first draft. And that's, that's, that's, that's kind of quite hard for me to get to that end, then it's just about kind of like really chipping away and finessing and you know, writing, even if I have to write, you know, new scene or whatever, the story's there. And it's just about really trying to make that the best it can be. I quite enjoy redrafting, to be honest.

**Paul**

And then just sort of taking us through this kind of chronological journey of being a writer and how it sort of develops. At some point, you have to get in the room with a creative team, a production team and a cast of actors. How is that experience as a writer?

**Daniel**

I think it's always different. I think it can be exciting. It can be, if I'm not sure about something, it can, you know, make me nervous. You know, it can, like, if I really care about something, but I'm watching, I kind of really care about everything I write. So like, I don't know, I'm worried like, can be like worried about if people get or not. But also, it's really nice to have a piece of work performed in front of people. And for it to kind of resonate with them in different ways. And it's really nice to hear work alive. Because, yeah, when you're, like I said, when you're like, right inside, and you're chuckling away in your room, I don't know if it's really funny, because, you know, I think I'm funny. But that don’t mean the world does. Like these jokes, you know, put it into here and there, they might not bang. So it's nice sometimes when, you know. Yeah, hear that response.

**Paul**

And one of the first things that we sort of tend to do in this kind of strange ritual in theatre is that we all sit around a table and we we read it and we hear it for the first time out loud together. How do you feel about read throughs as a writer, is that a stressful experience? Or fun one?

**Daniel**

Bit of both. Oh, 100% I'm like, well, as the read through is going on. I'm always like? Why the hell did I write that line? Well, that's way too, like I kind of like, as it's going on, I see all the typos. I see all the lines that don't need to be there and stuff. But it's an enjoyable experience. It really is. Like I said, as long as the story's there. The work is the kind of redrafting and like, I don't know, making it like, really sharp and really, yeah, clear. But I do enjoy a read through. But yeah, I'm defo one of these people that will be like, if I have my laptop, I'll be like, going through it and making notes as I go and not necessarily changing the script properly. But like, yeah, as I go.

**Paul**

And taking Canary as an example, you then stayed in that room as an actor and as a writer. And what's that like balancing those two things? How do you perform your own work and still keep a clear head on what is and isn't working textually versus kind of from an actor's point of view?

**Daniel**

It’s an interesting question, to be honest, like one of the things about Canary was, I’ve kind of spoken about this previously. But even when I came to you, I wasn't sure I wanted to act in it, because I wasn't sure I could do that, because I'd never done it before. I'd never written something. And I really wanted, like, I really wanted the story to work. So I really wanted, I guess I didn't really care about if it was me telling a story I'd rather have it told really well. So I'd rather like really focus on the writing and making it great, or really focus. I just didn't know if I could juggle that. But it was actually all right, it was actually all right, it is slightly having two heads. But it's also not because I don't know, Canary was just a process of play. And it was a collaborative process. And it's kind of understanding what your roles are in any given moment. And sometimes on Canary actors would look to me to kind of say, you know, what does this mean? And, like, what I mean by that, what does this mean, but not like, What does the word mean? But like, what does it mean, in terms of my character? or How should I be playing or stuff like that? I never answered, I’d just be like I don't know, cause, I think, even if you've got an answer in your head, when you were writing it, you have to allow people to play and stuff like that. Acting in your own work, you also have to allow yourself the opportunity to rediscover it and play with it and be open to working it in a different way than you could have imagined. Like there’s that bit in Canary that never made it. Where you made me run for like 10 minutes on the spot. It works. You just go with it. You play, you know, my I mean, and you're open to all of those things. And I really enjoyed the rehearsal process for Canary a lot. A lot. It was a lot of fun.

**Paul**

Yeah, it was really interesting actually working with you as a director on that piece. But seeing how you did shape shift between someone who, you know, one minute it was focusing on how do I deliver this? And then the next minute, how do I note that speech I just gave from a writer's point of view to myself, and then how do I support the other actors who know that this is my story, but who I'm also sharing a stage with? And, you know, I thought you really navigated that really openly and generously. But I can imagine, at times for you, that must have been quite tiring.

**Daniel**

It never got tiring weirdly. Nah, it was it was it was I think, I don't know Canary is an exception. Maybe an exception, but it just was such a fun, enjoyable process. Yeah, I just think, I know what it was like, and then you just have to be open. I know. Yeah, I'll never forget that moment, when you were like that I had like a whole speech. And I love it now. But like, had like a whole little speech. And you were like, you could probably just say that in a nod. And I was like, Yeah, probably could. But I love stuff like that, I really do. Cause, at the end of the day, it's about, I think everybody working towards trying to make something as best as it possibly can be. And in that regard, setting aside your own kind of like, idea, or you know, ego, or whatever it is in order to serve the story as best you can. And in order to serve yeah, the world as best you can.

**Paul**

And then, I guess the final vital component is the audience. And what's that, like when you first get previews? You first, you first get into your first productions with a lot of an actual audience encountering the work for the first time? how stressful is that as a writer? How do you how do you get through that?

**Daniel**

I find that exciting again, like, I think, it's a bit like that send button. And I've done all the work. I've done all the work and I know who I'm trying to reach and I know why I'm telling this story. So I just hope that it reaches the people I'm trying to reach. I hope it resonates with the people that it's supposed to resonate with. I like audiences coming in and hearing a story and I like that whole thing. I like that whole thing. I'm less nervous about audiences coming in than I am, like maybe about first read throughs or first days in rehearsal rooms, because the work’s already been done. You've done everything you can. Obviously the you can still change stuff in previews. Like, even if I don't know the first preview, like stuff doesn't hit, you have the opportunity to change it or amend it and go again, so I always find it quite an exciting moment of interaction, like, let's go, let's see what's going to happen. And see if you see what we have to do, you know,

**Paul**

If we can just slightly shift the spotlight towards your acting career and your role as an actor. And then we'll come back and do some listener questions, quite a lot of which touch on writing. I'm interested, first of all, like, how did you become an actor? And what does being an actor mean to you and what is being an actor?

**Daniel**

Oh, gosh, what is being an actor? Being an actor is a job, first and foremost. Being an actor is getting people's words, and finding a character that serves the piece as best it kind and serves you as best it can. The reason why I said it's a job first of all, is because I think sometimes with being an actor, it can become an all encompassing thing. But I think being an actor is a part of who a person is, it isn't everything about a person, I think that's a really important thing. That, to understand as an actor, for longevity in this industry. I think that's the thing that a lot of kind of younger actors sometimes get confused about, or, I don't know, like, everything is about being an actor. You know, if everything is about being an actor, and everything you do is about being an actor, then you kind of sometimes miss the opportunity to inform yourself, as a human, inform yourself as a person, do stuff outside of acting, that actually will probably help inform your craft.

**Paul**

And just, again, in the spirit of this podcast, just to sort of drill down on some of the specifics and the detail of being an actor. Could you talk us through a bit about what you do before you get in a room? So let's say you've got a job, you've been sent the script? What are the things that you need to have done before you get to that first day of rehearsals?

**Daniel**

Yeah, I think that that's subjective, again, based on a job, but for me, I need to know who that person is, I need to know who that character is, I need to know why they're there. And I really mean that, why they're there in that moment, at that time, doing that thing. And then when we get into rehearsals, we can really interrogate those things, interrogate those ideas. And maybe, you know, you know, director or present you with a different idea of why they're there, what they're doing, how they're doing it, and then you explore that or whatever, like, but I have to kind of fundamentally really understand the play and the world. And if I'm going into a world I have to have done my research on the world, I have to know the people who are in that world, have to kind of know that like, colour, the flavours a taste of that world that I think like sensory stuff is quite useful for me. In terms of the way that I think. Yeah, how that world feels and stuff, and how that character feels. But I say that, those things are going to be challenged in the room and you're going to explore things in different ways. So it's a balancing act for me. And then, you know, off book, on book and all that kind of stuff is entirely dependent on the process, the director, the thing. If nobody if nobody's like, prescribed that stuff. I prefer to kind of know my lines and be off book, but sometimes people don't like that. So kind of I'm kind of open to whatever process is going to be done in the room.

**Paul**

And what are rehearsals for you, what are you doing during rehearsals? What is it that you’re trying to gather?

**Daniel**

You are trying to make the best piece of work you can. You’re trying to serve the play as best you can you’re trying to serve the world as best you can, I think those things are very similar in terms of everyone’s end goal is kind the same, super objective or whatever, to make the best piece of work you can.

**Paul**

And is it for you does it feel closer to training or is it closer to performance, where does it sit for you. How much are you using yourself, how much are you just getting the building blocks ready to finally unleash when you finally get in front of an audience. What’s the purpose?

Oh no, I go for it in a rehearsal room, I really do. I go for it and make choices and play and stuff and some of those stuff won’t bang and we’ll go again but because psychology when an audience is in a space anyway you find extra naturally because it becomes a dialogue, you know what i mean, an audience always is going to bring more energy to you. That’s what i’d say.

**Paul**

On the show day like I think we’ve spoken a bit about audiences and what it means to come to terms with an audience, could you maybe just talk us through what you do on a show day, it’s something I’m always fascinated with footballers, what are they doing before the big match? What are you doing? What are you eating, when are you waking up, what gets you in the best place to do the best performance you can on the actual day of the show?

**Daniel**

I do life stuff in the morning and that can be as boring as washing up, doing your clothes, I do life stuff in the morning. But then I will, if a show is starting at 7.30, I probably will make my way to the area in the afternoon, get something to eat, depending on time, call and stuff obviously, get something to eat because I don’t eat after shows, so I get something to eat about 5.30/6ish. I’ll eat, I’ll chill out, go over any notes I’ve been given, yeah I really don’t have a set routine. I’d like to say I take it easy and meditate and stuff like but I don’t. Sometimes I have stuff in the day I have to get on with. Sometime you have a meeting in the day but you have to give yourself time and space to get in the zone, but how much time and space that is entirely dependent upon on the person. Some people need four hours, for me probably I need two and then I can go.

**Paul**

Just before we come to some of the listener questions, I just wanted to hear a little bit from you about reviews and criticism and I guess this is as both as a writer and an actor. How do you deal with that? Do you read reviews and how do you deal with the impact of those on your performance and how you feel about your work, both positive and negative.

**Daniel**

I read all of them, I think they’re really important. I think critics have a tough job and I appreciate them actually and I think some people don’t. I know this is what I'm saying is a bit weird for some people, cause some people hate reviews and stuff like that, but even if somebody comes and gives my work like one or two stars or whatever like I read the reasons why and I really understand it and sometimes it’s simply that your worldview isn’t the same as mine, you don’t get this. I think I understand also that critics are gonna have subjective tastes and a piece of art isn’t necessarily going to resonate with everybody. If you ask me to write a review of a death metal concert tomorrow I don’t know what I’m gonna write because it’s not my artistic, it’s not what i’m into do you know what I mean? Kind of understanding that a little bit is where my head’s at. I don’t expect everybody to constantly get everything, all my work so I don’t take it personally cause I’m like ok cool. If there’s something really triggering or whatever I think that’s a reflection on the critic more than me, I’m not gonna waste too much time or energy fighting that. Like ok cool you really don’t get this. Again it goes back to that thing that I’m saying I know why I’m writing these plays, I know why I’m telling the stories I wanna tell and I know who they’re for and sometimes critics are not the people they are for.

**Paul**

We’ll push onto some listener questions that deal with both writing and acting so thanks so much for everyone that got in touch and if you have any questions for future podcasts you can email us on ideas@middlechildtheatre.co.uk and please do also send in suggestion for who you’d like us to chat to. With that bit of admin out of the way Dan I’m going to fire some of these listener questions at you. First of all from Douglas Deans, who say any advice for anyone wanting to write or make gig theatre?

**Daniel**

Yeah know what the gig is, know the scale, know what gig theatre means to you and know why your’e writing it. Is this a gig like headline gig at Glastonbury or gig like dirty pub in greasy spoon somewhere down in town, or is this like a comedy club kinda vibe? Know your gig, know your vibe, know why that particular format and know that that element of the story is not an add on, it’s something inherent to to why you’re telling this story. I think some times for me gig theatres bad they’ve written a play and just slapped on the gig theatre element as an after thought and for me it kinda has to be an inherent part of the whole process.

**Paul**

The next one comes from Yasmin Beck who says I’m an actor and writer but one of the things I struggle with most is writing for myself. Do you have any sort of process you go through in order to do this?

**Daniel**

Yeah yeah I guess so. A part for yourself I guess is what she means? I look at the story I wanna tell, what’s important to you as a person and why is it important, then I tell that story. It really is as simple as that. Cause I don’t know what’s important to Yasmin in the world at the moment so I want to. I think it’s about presenting a worldview or something that’s important or something that’s going to resonate with you and resonate with others. Let me tell you something, I love theatre for challenging my worldview so many times and introducing me to so many different worldview that’s what I’d say. Go with what’s important to you, what will resonate with you, and what is that story and then try and incorporate that into your work.

**Paul**

Great thank you and on a similar theme from Larner Wallace-Taylor: as a theatre maker who writes and acts have you ever worried about the sometimes negative industry perception of doing both, especially at the same time?

**Daniel**

No I don’t care about that man, I’m doing what I’m doing and I’m really comfortable with what I’m doing. I don’t really worry about industry perception I never give any thought to it cause who is it that I’m worrying about for that question who is this industry I’m worrying about? As long as the stuff I’m doing is resonating with audiences and the people I want it to resonate with that’s enough man, I don’t worry about the industry as it were, I really don’t.

**Paul**

Next one’s from Joseph Long. How do we create more opportunities for theatre makers who are LGBTQ+, people of colour, northern, working class people. Often opportunities are only available if you’re white, middle class or live in London. How do we welcome those who don’t feel like they fit into that theatre scene?

**Daniel**

There’s two ways innit for me. You change the structures that exist already or you create new ones. Middle Child’s an example of that for me. Middle Child as it exists now is a fantastic theatre company doing incredible things but I knew it at its inception and it was kind born of that, why are people not telling these stories, know what I mean, going up there trying to make specific stories specific to Hull and stuff like that and that can turn into something. I think you write the stories first of all, you write those stories that are resonant to those communities, LGBTQ+, people of colour, northern, lower working class, you write those stories because they matter. How to tell them, you either tell them yourself, you find people who are prepared to tell those stories in those communities already, because I really think theatres should be serving those communities, or you go to those structure that traditionally haven’t told those stories and you make your stories so good that they have to tell it.

**Paul**

The final listener question is from Joe Beckett. With regards to writing gig theatre, what’s the process of writing music, do you write the script and leave gaps for a place for a piece of music or do you write the music first and write around that?

**Daniel**

I think a combination of both, sometimes I know the feeling of the music and so even if I don’t know what the song is exactly because I’m not, I don’t write music but know the feel so sometimes I leave the space for that feel but also I find it hard to differentiate sometimes because I write the words to music and write musicality into the language. So something could be spoken, something could be rapped, something could be sung, sometimes it’s inherent in the text, sometimes I leave a gap to explore a musical feel. I don’t think I often write the music first actually, because I don’t write music, yeah, so I don’t write music first.

**Paul**

I remember one of the first versions of Canary I saw had lots of real world references in it like songs that already existed and that was really useful wasn’t it as a starting point for the kind of flavour for each scene and the style of each scene?

**Daniel**

So in The Canary and the Crow it’s divided into tracks, it works like a concept album. So each track, I dunno the Lesson of IT, had four or five real life songs that I listened to or gave a feel to a certain bit so yeah, that’s how I came about it and I left space to put the lyrics to that kind of song or explore it musically in another way.

**Paul**

Great, thank you and thank you all for those brilliant questions. As I say please do get in touch for future episodes with future questions and if you’ve got any other suggestion of who you’d like us to chat to just drop us an email at ideas@middlechildtheatre.co.uk. Dan the final things I’m going to ask you is something we’re looking to do with every guest we have on and we’re just gonna play one of those desert island style games without stealing anyone’s copyright and just ask you that if you could only save three pieces of art what are you holding on to?

**Daniel**

Ahh what a question, yeah man, well what is art you know? For me football is art so I’m saving, I know it’s cheating but I’m taking that with me.

**Paul**

Hang on, you’re saving all football ever?

**Daniel**

I’m saying the stuff that people do on the field, that’s art.

**Paul**

So you’re saving the sport of football?

**Daniel**

I am saving the entire sport of football.

**Paul**

Well it’s either that or Hamlet right?

**Daniel**

Nah man, Hamlet can go in the bin, Hamlet’s not one of my three.

**Paul**

I didn’t think it would be.

**Daniel**

I’m gonna save Eskimo by Wiley, because I think it’s a track that started an entire generation of kids with music, grime kids and stuff like that.

**Paul**

Which I think was one of the tracks on the original Canary script we were talking about?

**Daniel**

XTC Functions on the Low is one of the originals as well. It’s a toss up between those two. People probably know XTC better from Stormzy’s Shut Up - it’s the background track. And the last thing I’m saving, so I’ve done football, it’s a hack I accept that, I’m gonna say Gogglebox.

**Paul**

Wow, in my head I had some thoughts on where you might take this and Goggglebox was not on my radar. How come Gogglebox?

**Daniel**

I think Gogglebox is the most pure like thing when it comes to human interaction and stuff and in lockdown it was a real barometer of the state of the nation and I just really loved it, more than stuff that I loved it so much you know, when Boris was coming out of his press conferences and talking nonsense and it felt a bit like, is he really saying the things he saying? And that Dominic Cummings thing or whatever, like to see their reactions on Gogglebox I was like they get it, we’re all feeling the same way. No matter what your political allegiances are, whatever they are you can tell when somebody chatting rubbish right. So I’m gonna say Gogglebox. I didn’t know I was gonna go there but I did and I’m happy with it.

**Paul**

I love it, there’s a balance there. So you’ve saved football the entire sport and the history of, you’ve saved Eskimo by Wiley and you’ve saved Gogglebox. What a world.

**Daniel**

I think I can live in that world.

**Paul**

Just Eskimo on repeat while you’re watching the match and seeing what people thought of that match on Gogglebox because nothing else exists.

**Daniel**

I think I can live in that world man.

**Paul**

Brilliant well great to chat with you man thank you for being so generous with your time and responses to those questions.

**Daniel**

No stress bro.

**Paul**

My dog has waited until now to start howling and barking.

**Daniel**

Yeah I can hear him

**Paul**

He’s done well he’s lasted the whole interview so he’s just saying goodbye to everyone but thanks Dan, thanks for being our first guest, that was great so really good to catch up with you man.

**Daniel**

Yeah dope, talk soon bro.

**Paul**

Nice one thanks so much, thanks for listening everybody. We’ll be back next month with another incredible guest so please do get your suggestions and questions into us on ideas@middlechildtheatre.co.uk and keep an eye on our social media channels for an announcement on who’s coming up next. Thanks so much everybody and take care.