

Episode 42: The Theatre

Summary

Our last guest Sarah is back for another episode. In this conversation, she talks about her love for the theatre in all its forms, including ballet and Pantomime.

Transcript

Nick: Today I'm talking once again with my friend Sarah, and Sarah you are really into the theatre, right?

Sarah: Yes, I am.

Nick: And so how did that begin, your love for the theatre?

Sarah: So I suppose my love for the theatre began actually with a love for classical ballet. I started studying ballet when I was three years old...

Nick: Wow.

Sarah: ...before I even had a chance to make a decision that I wanted to do it. My Mum decided that, you know, as all little girls do, she was going to send me to ballet class. And as I grew up, umm, while my friends sort of got to the age where that wasn't really cool anymore and they stopped doing it, I grew to really, really love it. And, umm, it became one of the great loves of my life and I started going to the theatre, really, to see ballet and to see, sort of, dance performances, and musicals also. Umm, so, yes, I studied music at school as well. So the combination of dance and music was always a good theatre experience for me.

Nick: And do you think it was one of those things that because you were forced down that way, then that just continued to lead you that way? Or do you really think that you independently developed a love for it?

Sarah: I think I did independently develop a love for it. Umm, I think at the age where I would have stopped it, umm, probably when I was about 12 or 13, something like that, when it was becoming not cool, and all my friends at school were stopping it, I wasn't allowed. My Mum and Dad insisted that I needed to carry

on¹ with this. And by the time I was 15-16, I loved it and I really wanted to do more of it. And then I had the other argument with my parents that, you know, I didn't have a time and I should be doing my homework and not spending so much time about ballet class and, uhh, daydreaming about being on the stage.

Nick: And do you think in this day and age where there's so much other entertainment and technology and things like that, is it, is the theatre still alive the way that it was?

Sarah: So that's a really interesting question. Umm, I think people don't have, necessarily, the same, umm, habit of going to the theatre as, umm, as a usual form of entertainment. I think it's more of a special thing to do. Umm, but it is a completely different experience to any video game or cinema experience that you will have because the actors or the dancers or the performers are live and they're humans like you and me and they're performing in front of you. And you get the sense of, umm, you know, it could go wrong. It could ... it's live. There's no, you know, stop and do a second take² if somebody forgets a line or messes up³ their footwork or something like that. It's live and you have to keep going. And there's something very courageous about being on the stage and performing in front of a live audience as well.

Nick: Right. And so you're from England, originally, and in London there's still a huge, umm, market for the theatre, right? Because you have the West End, and this is where all these famous plays take place.

Sarah: Absolutely, yeah. That's right.

Nick: And have you seen particular performances there that were really memorable?

Sarah: So, I haven't seen many performances in London, as such. I've seen a few, umm, of the big, umm, musical, umm, theatre performances. And I've been obviously to the royal opera house and seen the royal ballet, which is always a treat⁴. I lived in Moscow for a time when I was a student, and as a student of the Moscow state university I was entitled to⁵ quite a large discount on tickets for the Bolshoi Theatre. So I used to go very regularly to the theatre when I lived in Russia. And went to see ballets and operas there which was, umm, yeah, quite a magical

¹ to carry on (phrasal verb): to continue, to keep doing something

² take (as a noun): an attempt to do a scene in movies, TV shows etc

³ messes up (phrasal verb: to mess up): makes a mistake

⁴ treat: something special or pleasurable, usually that you rarely get to experience

⁵ was entitled to: had the right to, could claim

experience, really. It's not every day that⁶ you get to go to the Bolshoi Theatre, so for me that was really special.

Nick: Right, because in all kinds of performance like that, I mean even during the Soviet period, it was so famous for the perfect timing and the following of instructions and everything like that.

Sarah: Absolutely, there's something with ballet that's very, very disciplined. And I think that appealed to that, sort of, Soviet mentality. Rather like gymnastics as well, they had very good rhythmic gymnastics teams. That, umm ... yeah, it is very much a discipline and it's very hard work and, umm, and it is a demonstration of extreme strength and physical capacity. So I think that was what made it ... made them shine⁷ in that respect. And they still do shine, umm, even post-Soviet, they still shine. Umm, and it's still a very special experience.

Nick: And now you live in Copenhagen as you told us last time, and what's the theatre scene like there?

Sarah: So the theatre scene in Copenhagen is quite exciting because, as I think I mentioned in my last, umm, discussion with you, in Denmark they speak very good English. So there are two sides to the theatre scene in Copenhagen. One is the Danish side, which, umm, again they have a very, umm, uhh, a very good royal opera and royal ballet company, umm, who do quite traditional performances. They also have quite a lot of, umm, experimental performances in Danish, experimental plays and drama. But they also have a professional English-speaking theatre scene, which, umm, has been around for about 15-20 years now, which is not, you know ... that's quite good going. And I've been lucky enough to do some performances with one of their companies. Umm, so they perform in English, usually plays with quite a small cast, three or four people. Umm, and they have a very good following, even, umm, schools, uhh, with school children, uhh, come to watch the plays and to, umm, to, yeah, have a theatre experience in English. And as, I mean, as you said in your first question, you know, is that a real entertainment experience for them? It's been ... it was very interesting being in a play with a lot of school, uhh, school-age, sort of, teenage audience members, who weren't used to coming to the theatre and who weren't used to that experience. And, umm, we did the play *The Woman in Black*, which is, I think, the second-longest running play in the West End in London. It's been on for, I can't remember how many years now, 20-odd years, without a break. And it's, umm, recently been made into a film with Daniel Radcliffe, who played Harry Potter, and a very scary, scary film. It's a horror film, and most of the kids who had, uhh, who came to the theatre to see the show had seen the film. So they knew it was going to be scary, but they all said that it

⁶ It's not every day that ... (phrase): It's not often that, it's rare that

⁷ shine (verb): to excel, to be very good at something (in this case)

was so much scarier in the theatre than it was watching it at the movies. They all screamed at some point in the play. The audience all screamed. They felt ... it felt like a real, live ghost experience for them because they were in the middle of it in a small theatre in Copenhagen.

Nick: No, that's really interesting. Umm, and so going back to English theatre for a minute, there's this one particular traditional form of English theatre called the Pantomime, which you've been involved in, uhh, a lot, and so what is that?

Sarah: So Pantomime is quite an interesting and, as you say, very specific to British theatre. It is, uhh, traditionally done at Christmas time and it is a take, usually, on a fairytale story. Umm, the main, uhh, aspect of it is that good will prevail⁸ over evil. That is the main thing that happens.

Nick: Well that's a nice theme for Christmas time.

Sarah: It's a nice theme for Christmas time, exactly. Umm, it's very much aimed at children, so we encourage a lot of children to come and, umm, be in the audience. And there's a lot of interaction between the actors on the stage and the audience, which is what makes it quite special. Umm, the children are requested to indicate whenever the evil character is on the stage by booing and hissing⁹ at them. And if the evil character is going to ... is creeping up¹⁰, umm, to surprise the good character, they are to yell, 'It's behind you!' And they get very involved, umm, and that makes it feel like a real experience for them. And there's a lot of songs and dance routines. There are also, umm, some more adult jokes for the Mums and Dads to keep them entertained. And usually the young male hero is actually played by an actress, whereas the old woman is usually played by a man. So there's some interesting, umm, there are some interesting elements of it.

Nick: And has that come to Copenhagen as well?

Sarah: It's come to Copenhagen, yes. As part of English amateur dramatics, we have a drama society for people aren't professional actors but who love the theatre anyway. And we usually put on a Christmas performance, umm, which has become a bit of a tradition and, umm, a lot of the English-speaking children in Copenhagen really look forward to coming and joining in and coming and seeing it. We usually pull them up onto the stage to dance with us and, uhh, yeah, we give them little sweeties and have them sing songs with us and they love it.

⁸ prevail: defeat, triumph

⁹ booing and hissing: making noises of disapproval

¹⁰ creeping up (phrasal verb: to creep up): to move close to someone quietly so they don't know you're there

Nick: Alright, thank you very much.

Sarah: Thank you.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Sarah begin ballet lessons?
2. How did Danish schoolchildren react to the theatrical performance of *The Woman in Black* that Sarah was involved with in Copenhagen?
3. According to Sarah, what is the main theme of Pantomime performances?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. It will be a difficult race but whichever runner has trained the hardest will _____.
2. For my birthday, my husband took me out to dinner and a show. It was a real _____.
3. He plays piano perfectly during practice, but whenever he has to play a concert, he gets nervous and he always _____.
4. The movie director said the scene was almost perfect as it was but he asked the actors to do one more _____ just in case.
5. If you go to a football game in Brazil, you will hear a lot of _____ from the home crowd. They really hate the opposition teams.
6. I bought a new microwave but after one week it stopped working. I thought I _____ a refund, but the shop wouldn't give me one.
7. A lot of horror movies involve a bad guy _____ on the heroine from behind. The heroines never seem to know the bad guy is there!
8. It was hard climbing the volcano and I almost gave up but my friends wanted _____, so I kept going with them.
9. They were decent singles tennis players, but now that they play doubles together, they really _____. They have won a lot of major tournaments together.
10. I just saw three different car accidents on my way home from work. _____ you see that.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Do you enjoy the theatre? What type of theatre do you like most - plays, musicals, dance performances, ballet, opera, or something else?
2. Is there a theatre scene in your country? If so, what types of performances are popular?
3. *The Woman in Black* is described as 'the most terrifying live theatre experience in the world'. Would you like to see it?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. She began at age three because she was forced to by her mother.
2. They all screamed because the play was so scary.
3. That good will prevail over evil.

Exercises

1. prevail
2. treat
3. messes up
4. take
5. booing and hissing
6. was entitled to
7. creeping up
8. to carry on
9. shine
10. It's not every day that