

Episode 1 - Who are Smoking Apples?

Introduction: Welcome to our Smoking Apples podcast as we get ready to release our first ever digital tour of our show *Flux*. In this series, we bring you an exclusive behind the scenes insight into our theatre company, including embarrassing stories, feminist chat and all sorts of puppet related content. Enjoy.

Hattie: Welcome to the Smoking Apples podcast. Here we are to talk about all things Smoking Apples and particularly *Flux*. So to start with, let's introduce ourselves. I'm Hattie. I am taller than your average female, at nearly 6 foot I've never quite learnt to balance properly so handy that I'm sitting down in my rather cluttered office for this podcast. I decided to make an effort today, so I've put some basic make up on my large oval shaped face. Though I've done nothing about the five inches of grey roots growing over my bleached strawberry blonde hair, I am wearing a lot of blue today. I've got a blue cardigan and a patterned blue dress on. But don't worry, I am not feeling blue.

Molly: Great. Hello, I'm Molly. I'm a 5 foot 8 woman with long dark hair and blue grey eyes, I have two characteristic moles slash beauty spots, whichever you prefer, on either cheek and in between these is a big, friendly smile. I always smile with my teeth on show and I've got an hourglass figure. And the hourglass figure is currently inside a blue and white stripey T-shirt and a mustard cardigan jumper thing. And mustard, as many of you will know, is my favourite colour to wear and to put on the walls and sofas and beds and other things in my house,

Hattie: Perfect

Matt: Classic. So I am Matt. I am a 5 foot 8, 9... I've never quite measured, male and I am of average build, which is basically a polite way of saying I'm slightly chunky, but that's okay. I roll with it, dad 'bods' and all that and I am in need of a haircut. I still haven't managed to have one of those. I would say that my beard is currently just over well groomed, but still nevertheless always one of those things I take most pride in, my face, keeping it nice and trim. I am in jeans and I'm in a hoodie and my smartwatch has just buzzed to let me know I've got a message, I'm up with the tech. Oh and I also wear glasses. So that's me.

Hattie: Lovely. So thank you very much. Let's kick things off then, shall we, who are Smoking Apples? Do you want to jump in Molly?

Molly: Yeah, perfect. Yeah, I know all the answers to these early questions. These are, these are the things that I get asked all the time. So I've got some nice non garbled prepared answers for you. Here we go. (Laughs) So Smoking Apples are an award winning puppetry and visual theatre company and we formed in 2010. So we are now almost 11 years old. Huzzah! And yeah, we make puppetry and visual theatre shows, so we make indoor touring work, we make outdoor touring work and large scale spectacle pieces. And we also do a lot of kind of outreach or specialised projects for different groups, young people or people living with dementia or schools. So kind of all different types of audiences. And a lot of our work is for adults and young adults. And more recently, we've started branching out into the family based shows, particularly with our outdoor stuff. And pretty much we always have puppets in the piece. So they range from full size, full body, kind of human lifelike type puppets to tabletop puppets, to objects, to shadow puppetry and everything in between, basically. And then the visual elements, essentially anything that you could sort of say in quite complicated dialogue or text. We tend to try and avoid

that and think about how we can visually represent things. So we often use light and sound in that as well to, to find kind of new and different ways to tell stories.

Hattie: Brilliant, brilliant, thank you. So following on from that, I would like to ask Matt, how would your parents describe what you do?

Matt: Parents describe what Smoking Apple's do?

Hattie: Yeah, and what you do within Smoking Apples.

Matt: My parents would say that...

Hattie: Your parents, who are our number one fans by the way

Matt: Number one fans, yep.

Molly: Legend, superstar.

Matt: Yeah, let let let's just give some context. So I don't know my mum and dad have probably seen in our hands, what, 9, 10 times?

Molly: Many, many, many times.

Matt: Yeah. Basically what I was doing is she realised when she, when she came to see *In Our Hands*, obviously the first couple of times she was just watching the show and then she for one show just watched... I can't remember who it was. I think it was George she did first. She just watched George for the entire show. No one else just watched literally what he was doing backstage, what he was doing on stage. And then she decided to go see another four times so that I can watch Molly, Matt, Hattie, Luke and basically still got this running joke with George that she's convinced that he eats the foam chip, that he bites, he spits out backstage, but he does it in such a sneaky way that she's convinced that he just eats it. So what would they say Smoking Apples do? I mean, they're biased aren't they, so would say that we're immense and amazing and...

Hattie: Sounds like a perfectly reasonable appraisal of us. (Laughter)

Matt: Yeah, I mean, I'm pretty sure. Pretty sure everyone, everyone's would say that. I mean, maybe, maybe not everyone's but. Yeah, yeah. You know, no specifics. Not giving specific names there. But yeah.

Molly: Your Mum Matt, is basically like like the world's best understudy I reckon if we...

Matt: Yeah. 100 percent

Molly: If we, if there was, if we were all in like some sort of awful trouble and you know, once one member of the cast, any member of the cast, it didn't matter which one couldn't make it or was sick or whatever. Yeah. We just give your Mum a ring, perfect, done, job done.

Matt: 100 percent. 100 percent.

Molly: Oh, this is a good one. What is your first Smoking Apple's memory? I mean. I mean, no comment. No, I'm joking. I'm joking.

Hattie: Are we talking after....

Matt: *(In a different voice)* This is a shoeless hostel .

Hattie: No (laughter)

Molly: This is a good one.

Matt: Now you're going to have to tell the story.

Hattie: *(Through laughter)* No, why would you do that?

Matt: No because this is the first memory and it's the best memory.

Hattie: It's not the first memory... is it?

Matt: Well well no. Well, I don't know. It's one of my first memories. We were just like, yeah, we've started Smoking Apples. This is like ten, eleven years ago. We were like, well, yeah we've just started Smo... We've just started Smoking Apples. We're going to make shows and we're going to tour around in a caravan and we're going to do shows in the woods. And it's going to be about fairies and stuff like that, which is completely fine. But, and then basically we decided, let's go into this wooded area where we're from was, it was in like, Somerset.

Molly: It was in like Somerset, yeah. Because it was with the OG. Our OG member Aimée Holmes

Hattie: (Sings) AiAiméemee Holmes

Molly: If she's listening, love you. So, when we were when we first started the company, we were actually 4 and our 4th member AiAiméemee, who we love dearly,

Hattie: Not 4 years old. Four people.

Molly: No, 4 people. Yeah. And so at this point in the narrative, Aimée was very much there and oh, sorry for anyone listening. I've just really coolly knocked my glasses wonky across my face.

Hattie: Sorry. We were talking about

Matt: We were talking about a shoeless hostel. Yes. Let's not let's not digress from that story and try and weevil out of that.

Hattie: But we decided to talk about Flux at some point, just saying,

Matt: Yeah, we can talk about Flux at some point, but people need to understand where we've come from before they can understand where we are.

Hattie: Our origins.

Matt: Yeah our origins and right. So let me let me abbreviate this. So basically we were like, let's go to a forest and like, you know, take pictures of us. And it basically ended up like looking like moody band photos. With like, oh yes, good... Anyway, we decided I will stay this night in a hostel in the middle of Somerset and we arrived. I can't even remember. But it was this like proper crazy old lady who run it, you know, like, you know, the sort of the sort of thing that characters are based on,

Hattie: Like she I'm not even sure if she was real, you know what I mean? You think was that real, did that happen?

Matt: She could have been a witch. She could have been a witch, which could have been the witch in the forest. Anyway, we get there and then we open the door and there are all of these slippers everywhere. The first thing she said is this is a shoe less hostel. So you take your shoes off and you put them on the shelf and then you can pick up a pair of random flip flops, whatever it was. Lucky dip, whatever size, you know you need.

Molly: If you got a matching pair fantastic, but probably not.

Hattie: Yeah.

Matt: Yeah, I was good.

Hattie: See, so my first Smoking Apples memory. But maybe you don't count this is us sitting around the table, which is a story that I feel like I've now made up, where we're sitting around the table in the cafe at Rose Bruford.

Matt: By the window.

Hattie: By the window with the OG Aimée Holmes and, someone says, oh, I think we should start a theatre company and we all go, 'yeah, OK, let's do it'. And then someone else goes, I feel like it was Aimée says, I think we should be called Smoking Apples. And we went, 'Yeah, OK,' That's, that's why I would call my first Smoking Apples memory.

Molly: Yeah. We really thought it through basically is what I take away from that,

Hattie: Considering it was such a light hearted moment with not a lot of thought, apparently, the fact that we are still going 11 years later is pretty good.

Matt: OK, well, then seen as a real memorable moments, I'm going to say, what's your most memorable moment from the making of *Flux*? Hattie?

Hattie: I mean, if we're talking outside the rehearsal room, it's one of the moments when I fell over and hurt myself somewhere, probably in Kendal.

Matt: Kendal.

Molly: You're going to be more specific because this happens all the time

Hattie: In another hostel where there was, I was a little (breaks into laughter) oh, we're going to have to cut out all the laughing.

Matt: It is part of it, people can understand how much fun we have, and that basically how much joy you bring us by just flopping around.

Molly: Being a giraffe

Hattie: Yeah, that was a little toilet and outside and there was that was a step going into it. And there's a sign on the door that said, mind your head, and then going out. I saw a sign that said mind your head, so I ducked but I forgot there was a step. So I just completely twisted and fell onto the floor. And this was like half eight in the morning. Yeah. Then I had a twisted my ankle but considering the get out there with the *Flux* set was not particularly joyous, I think I did quite well really.

Matt: It's never a good trip. Oh, it's always a good trip when one of the questions, oh did you have a nice time away? Yeah. Lovely. Yeah. How did the show go? Yeah. Good. Hattie fall over? Yeah. Ah classic.

Hattie: Yeah. How many times did you fall over on this R&D?

Molly: My favourite memory from *Flux* was, I mean this again is really, I feel like sums up our creative process, really well. So for ages and ages, so as some of you may or may not know, our main character in *Flux* is this beautiful five foot eight like me, full sized puppet. So she's a half, she's a whole, she's a whole woman and she's fantastic. But anyone who's sort of seen our previous shows might know that light hair is not really something we do with puppets. This is a weird conversation, isn't it? But it's true. Like hair is always a bit of a like sort of strange, edgy area where we're like, oh, I dunno, like should they have hair?

Should they have hair, like no one has hair in *CELL*. None of them have hair, they have a beard *In Our Hands*. And I dunno, it's just a hard thing to find like textually because it can be the difference between, like making puppets look, like, hyperreal and like a bit creepy. But then if they don't have it, then they also look creepy.

So anyway, the suggestion was, oh, why don't we try a wig? And of course, me being me I was like, no, it's never going to work. Never, we're not getting a wig. It's going to look cheap, tacky. It's going to look nasty. Absolutely not. I'm not even considering it. That's me who doesn't make or design anything saying that. But, you know, like I said, this happens all the time. And Matt and Hattie were like, well, look, you know, we've tried all these other things and like, I really think we should just get it and try it. No, no, I'm not having it. We're not having a wig for her anyway. So, of course, it gets weirder alongside looking at, like, life sized body bags to store Kate in on the Internet. We're also looking at 80s perms, and then the moment that we put that hair on her, I was like, it's perfect. It's absolutely perfect. And it was such a nice moment to see her, like, come to life. And it sounds stupid because obviously we're making her come to life. Spoiler alert.

But yeah, I remember having that conversation and yeah. So it's really nice to know that after eight years of working in this way and making shows together, it's nice to still know that you can be surprised and nice to still know that, I mean, I'm fine with the concept that I can be wrong and wrong regularly, but yeah, it's good to kind of have that like live moment and where all the like you've been working for ages and like all the pieces aren't quite fitting together. And then all of a sudden, like, everything just clicks. And then we had Kate and once we had Kate, you know, we basically had the show because, yeah, it's all about her.

Hattie: Yeah tend to start with the puppets and we tend to work out who that main character is, and start with the puppet. But before I go kind of philosophical on that, you're

talking about wigs reminds me of how it wasn't the first wig that we tried that we went with. And there were...

Molly: What was the first wig?

Hattie: The first wig was like long and straight.

Molly: Oh yeah. With like the funny. Funny fringe thing. Oh yeah that was bad, that was tres bad.

Hattie: Yeah, but I tell you who didn't look awful in that wig, was Matt.

Molly: (Laughter) Perfect, oh dear.

Matt: There's not a lot of things I don't look good in. Let's be honest.

Hattie: I think I've got a picture of you dressed up as Kate with her old wig on somewhere. Yeah. Yeah, that's when you know that you need to have a break or end the rehearsal day and go home.

Molly: Oh, without telling us too much about the story. Can you tell us about *Flux* what has been the journey of the show so far and what is next?

Hattie: So when did we start making *Flux*?

Molly: Well, we did an R&D in 2016. Then we left it for ages and then we did an R&D in 2018. And then we premiered in 2018 as well so we did them in the same year. Yeah.

Hattie: Yeah. And it didn't used to be called *Flux* as well. It had another name or almost all of our shows start with another name, as well. So it used to be called nuclear vision but new... Nuclear, new clear vision. We thought it was very clever...

Molly: Super catchy, you say why we changed it.

Hattie: We, as you said Molly, we did a bit of R&D and then we did another week where it was just in a room with everyone that we kind of wanted on the team at that point that we knew of. And then. Yeah, and then we finished the show and then we have already toured it once, which is great. Trying to think. What else has happened on the way? I think, like the

Molly: I think like the biggest thing that's quite interesting about doing it in this way is like, you know, the attitudes of people that are changing. So like when we first made *Flux*, okay it wasn't that long ago. But, you know, I definitely think that part of the reaction like to the show, both positive and negative, was to do with, like, the fact that it was a female protagonist. And like, you know, we really sort of we don't address, like kind of, you know, the gender balance in a really, like, aggressive or strong way. It's quite subtle. It's quite human. I'd say perhaps much more reflective of like, you know, a kind of everyday of everyday experience of it, I think that's fair to say. And I think it's interesting to see you know it will be interesting to see. Now we're going to like put it out there again. And in this new format, which we probably should talk about in a minute, like how, you know, I guess maybe, you know, attitudes have changed to it. And, you know, just to see kind of how it lands with like an audience in twenty twenty one particular with like, you know, everything

we've been for in the last year. And it will be interesting to see if I guess people have an and I kind of will respond differently. I think that's what I'm looking forward to hearing about.

Hattie: Yeah. I feel like you hit on something there for me, which was to do with kind of the everyday presentation of the treatment of womxn or being a womxn. And in a way I kind of go, yeah, it is really every day and is really normal. But it's also there's also little things that happen in there that really shouldn't be normal. And we shouldn't, they shouldn't be things that we feel like are every day, but we do. And I found throughout the journey of the show that that voice and that kind of line of the narrative became a lot more focussed, a lot more clear for me. Certainly, and we'll talk to Clancy dramaturg on another episode, but so we can talk more about that with them. But yeah, I think it definitely, definitely grew and went on a journey in that sense and.

Molly: Yeah, for sure. So Matt do you want to tell everyone, what we're doing, what's happening with *Flux* this time around? Because I guess, like, you know, it's slightly different.

Matt: Yeah, we were due to tour it last year again for a second tour, but due to the pandemic, we rescheduled the tour and then that couldn't happen. So now we have decided to film *Flux* and not just in one camera for archival purposes, but it's going to be a highly interactive live piece of theatre that will be brought to you in your own homes. And that will be from starting in June and will run for three weeks or just over three weeks. So you'll be able to see the show. Online from your sofa.

Hattie: Brilliant I'm really excited about it. I mean, we've done some bits and bobs and films behind a camera before, not in films necessarily, but it's quite often been for other people for another project. And it's really nice to be working, bringing our own show and to film and record.

Matt: Yeah, that's true. That's true. And I'm looking forward to like where we're going to be filming it, you know, close, close to home, home turf. Um, so yeah, I think yeah. I think it's going to be it's going to be a fun week. I mean, we've got to remember the show. We haven't done it for, what, two years now. Yeah, I know. I literally can't remember the first thing I do. I think the first thing I do is... I, I, I, yeah. I don't remember. I actually play you guys. You guys are pushing the set forward. Yeah. I, I, I just walk around taking shadows out of the set.

Hattie: Yeah that's correct. And I hide behind Molly and Anne with a full sized puppet and a desk whilst they push the blocks forward. Yeah. It's going to be fine. We're going to remember it no problem

Molly: For sure, yeah.

Matt: Where are you all in five years time? Where are we all in five years time? Hattie.

Hattie: We are. In five years time. I would say. Touring or doing some sort of new show for maybe like a month somewhere exotic right now. Yeah? If I say it comes true, right?

Matt: I could work with that.

Hattie: You know, I wouldn't say no to going back to Malaysia or.

Matt: Yeah so for all you international people listening five years from now, we want to be doing a show in the evening, but on the beach in the daytime.

Hattie: Yeah, early evening. So we can go back to the beach. Yeah.

Matt: Yeah. Watch the sunset. Great. If we could do a five o'clock show, that'll be great. And can you pay for our hotel and the flights? Thank you. Molly, where are you in five years time, like, in relation to Smoking Apples? Or not you might have left.

Hattie: Oh, the glasses are going down the nose!

Molly: I won't have left. That is wishful thinking Matthew Lloyd and that is not going to happen. So you can put that to one side.

Matt: No I'm just saying.

Molly: Stop planting the seed. It will never work you know me. So in five years time, I think I hope that we are. Well, I don't hope. We will still be making work. Obviously. I agree with Hattie. I think it would be nice to do more international touring. That's like a really weird thing that we've just sort of had to like, you know, stop ourselves dead in the tracks for, for obvious reasons. So I really hope that we can pick that back up again. And I feel like we're starting to get there already. That will have multiple cast and you know our lovely, wonderful trusted ensemble. You know, all the other people that are, make this work, not just three of us, George Luke, Lydia Anne Sherry Clancy, you know, etc., Sofia and all those people that really

Matt: To name a few

Molly: Do everything behind the scenes. I'm so sorry if I forgot anyone. I don't mean it like that is just so off the top of my head. And, and, yeah, I feel like we'll have multiple shows out on the road at once.

Hattie: David

Matt: David, if you're listening, Molly doesn't like you.

Molly: I'm sorry, David. It's not true. Just not true. And yeah, I feel like that's you know will be yeah. We'll be making work but we're reaching more people. I think that's what I'd really like to do. Yeah. Doing in five years time. More more shows out on the road. Exciting ideas.

Hattie: Yeah. Maybe we can afford a team to lug the set around for us by that point.

Molly: Can we have a van as well? I'd love a van. Please. Please. Whoever's listening get us a van, please. (laughter)

Hattie: Matt, what do you reckon?

Matt: I probably would have quit and gotten a job as an accountant

Hattie: Sure

Matt: (Laughs) Right

Molly: Liar, liar pants on fire.

Matt: Yeah, no, not accountancy. I don't know why that came to my head. Five years, five years time from now, here's where we are, right. There's a rehearsal going on. And I'm in the next room, which is also the workshop. And I'm just, you know, there's a couple of other people in there and I'm like, hey, you know, we need to get this bit of set made because it needs to go into rehearsals this afternoon and then upstairs Sofia's in the office. So basically, we've got this, we've got our own office rehearsal room workshop, all in one location and we're in the middle of rehearsal. So everyone's there. Doesn't matter where it is. It's not you know, no one's there permanently. It's where it's in a state of *Flux*. And, you know, there is, there is, you know, one place where we can just and there's accommodation there and shipping containers or something. I dunno, maybe not shipping containers, Air BnB. Yeah, that's where we are in five years time in a rehearsal room with lots of people around us, because Covid's not a thing then and yeah, we're having a great time.

Hattie: Perfect. That sounds good to me. Any of those options. Thank you.

Matt: Yeah. And the show is going to be then going to Malaysia where we'll be able to perform it on a beach. Except David won't be there because Molly doesn't like David

Molly: Oh god!

Hattie: No he's our newest person.

Molly: David. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry

Matt: She forgot you David, she forgot you remember that.

Molly: David has spent three weeks with us rehearsing in a lockdown bubble. So I think he knows you well enough to know that you are winding him and me up and succeeding

Hattie: Great. So let's. All right. Let's take out the evil laughter so I don't have to edit it out later.

So lovely. So let's wrap up, for, thank you for listening. Do tune in to future episodes. So we will on one episode be talking about the puppets. We will also be talking about the music from *Flux*, the story, Women in Science, looking at the lights and also how we've been working to make the show more accessible this time around. So there's lots there to hear and find out and probably a few more stories about me falling anywhere along the way. Lovely. Thank you, everyone.

Molly: Thank you.

Matt: Bye

All: Bye.

Outro music by Jon Quin

