

Episode 4 Audio DRAFT 35 mins.mp3

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.

Welcome to another episode of our Smoking Apples podcast series, which we are doing to talk about our virtual tour of Flux, which is very exciting which is very new for us. We have a lovely episode for you this evening. I've got with me here Anne, Clancy, Molly and I am Hattie. And I'm going to start by describing myself for you. So I'm Hattie. My pronouns are she and her. I am taller than your average female. I am about six foot tall, so I tend to fall over quite a lot, which you may have heard in other episodes. I, however, am sitting down this evening, so hopefully we won't be falling off my chair for you. But who knows? We will see, I have made a bit of an effort, I've put some makeup on today on my round oval shaped face. My grey roots are showing through because I haven't been to hairdressers in a very long time. I'm wearing a stripy blue and white striped top with a purple cardigan and I'm in a very cluttered office full of files, bits and bobs.

Anne So my name is Anne my pronouns are she and her, she's got big round voice at the eyeballs round and around as I've got today, some dangly Indian earrings and hopefully they don't think dingle in the mic, unknowingly I copied Hattie and I'm also wearing a stripy top and a red cardigan that has two out of four buttons and I'm in my bedroom surrounded by a very large and sprawling cheese plant and facing my lovely big windows looking on to a quiet southeast London street.

Clancy Hi, I'm Clancy and I use they/them pronouns. I'm a tall, thin, androgynous person and I have super pale complexion and like short silvery blond hair that's shaved at the back and at the sides, but kind of longer at the top. Like kind of Andy Warhol wished he was an eboy, kind of the style. I've got thick, dark eyebrows that totally give away my bleach job. And one of my front teeth is chipped, both my ears pierced and I have chipped nail polish, black nail polish on. I'm wearing a black turtleneck under a black jumper because that's how goth I always am. And I'm just in my office, which is a kind of boring white cube. That's kind of it.

Molly Well I'm Molly and my pronouns are she/her and I am a five foot eight woman with long dark hair and blue grey eyes. I have two characteristic moles on either side of my cheeks or beauty spots, if you prefer to call them that. And in between those there is a very big smile filled with lots of teeth. I know their favorite of Anne's that's why I've mentioned them. And I always smile with my teeth on show and I am currently wearing a blue jumper, kind of blue, yeah bright blue jumper over a purple patterned dress and that is covering an hourglass figure. And I am also in a very cluttered office. Hence tonight, the theme Smoking Apple's cluttered offices are go. That's also lockdown life, isn't it? So yeah, that's me.

Hattie Brilliant, so I'm going to hand over to Clancy, who's going to be asking our questions today if you want to take control.

Clancy Super all right. Let's start off talking about Flux a little bit. So can you tell me what the story of Flux is? And no spoilers, please.

Hattie It's hard to put into a nutshell, but it's essentially the story of a woman trying to find her voice. That's a nutshell isn't it? But she happens to be a physicist. She is a woman in science. And there's quite a lot of narrative around that experience as well, although we feel like the story could apply to any woman or even any person in any role, because it's really just about finding the confidence in yourself and fighting against other people who want to cut you off and stop you from being heard. So that's how I would describe it.

Clancy And what roles do you all play in the show?

Hattie So I am the lead puppeteer on Kate, I puppeteer her head.

Molly And I also puppeteer Kate, mostly her other hand, but sometimes her feet, but mostly her hand.

Anne And I'm mostly her feet and sometimes her hand

Molly Yeah me and Anne interchange roles.

Clancy I'm really, so really we're all Kate.

Molly (Laughter) Stop it.

Clancy Super. So Hattie and Molly, you're both the artistic directors with Smoking Apples, so you've got two female co-artistic directors. But this is your first show about a woman. Can you tell me about why that is?

Hattie The shame.

Molly Oh, it's such a funny one. Like, I just don't know why we've never done it. I don't think it's it was a conscious choice, to be honest with you. And that says a lot about society. And I think that, you know, we just have always been drawn to male narratives. And I think maybe in a way. So before Flux, we made In Our Hands, which was like, if we're going to put big labels on things, I would say that that was like the man show and like the woman show, because In Our Hands was really about male relationships and kind of like lack of communication or communication issues that lots of men find challenging, among other things. But it was a very male-dominated environment to work in as well. And I think it wasn't maybe until we made that one that we were like, OK, hang on a minute. Like, we actually never make shows about women.

Hattie Yeah. And wasn't so CELL was about motor neurone disease, which was before that. And doesn't that affect men more than women?

Molly Oh, yeah. Yeah it does.

Hattie So it sort of came from the subject matter more than, more than a thought about it. But then with this show we went, we need to make a show about a woman now. So we actually started with that, this time instead of the subject matter.

Molly Super weird though. Like I remember in the early I'm sure you remember this Anne as well like in the early process, like having to make decisions about like Kate's body as a puppet, like we found it so weird and uncomfortable. And I was like, I just don't know, like I just don't know what like shape she should be or what size her waist should be. Or have

we made her too, like, skinny or have we you know, is that representative if there were like for every single question, I feel like we asked ourselves about any of the male characters or puppets or anything like that for any of the other shows. I feel like with Flux that was about ten extra questions that went with it, which was really strange, like not something I've really experienced before, when making shows, to be honest.

Clancy So then when you were looking for inspiration, is there anyone that inspired Kate, is Kate based on anyone?

Hattie She is loosely based on a female physicist called Lise Meitner. And so we were looking into brilliant women, women who have done amazing things, but not necessarily been acknowledged for those things. And so we came across Lise Meitner who sort of was missed, was missed out the Nobel Prize and the male colleagues she worked with took it and didn't acknowledge her at the time. And it was very much largely her work as well. So then we started working on Kate's character and obviously that took a different direction. But it was really good starting point.

Molly And I think with all our characters, they always end up being like a sort of strange amalgamation from like the research we've done and the people that we've met along the way. So there's a few other people sort of sprinkled in there that have been big inspirations. I think about Elspeth Garman, Dr. Elspeth Garman, I should say. Who we met in Oxford. She's a professor at Oxford University. And yeah, she was fantastic and listening to lots of her experiences, she was a young female nuclear physicist in the 1980s. You know, I think that all starts to kind of shape and build. And then obviously there's some of our own when none of us are nuclear scientists. Right, guys? Right. So, yeah, but even I think some of our own personal experiences, like as women as well, have obviously started to effect that because, yeah.

Clancy How can it not? Cool. So why do you think it's important to highlight women in STEM careers?

Anne Well, it does feel like as you were saying earlier. There is some sort of lack of recognition for the achievements of women in multiple multiple sectors and environments, but especially in science. And it's not that they didn't exist as you might be tempted to think, but just that there is sort of an invisibilisation, is that a word?

Molly It is now.

Anne They're sort of removed from history. And it's quite obvious to see how harmful that might be on the women living now and the future, of women, but also of the sector itself, because I just think an industry deserves to have women involved in it and will necessarily be better for having women and women identifying people involved in them, involved in them. So if it can do, it's sort of like a tiny little bit of reversal of that removal of women from history then. And that would be a good thing.

Clancy So what did you guys learn about physics and about women in STEM then while you were making the show?

Molly What did we learn about physics? Everything! Everything, we didn't know from before.

Hattie Well we actually worked on a workshop for early secondary school children. So it was looking at puppetry and physics. And we worked with the Institute of Physics to create that, so we had some experts, to help us. And I feel like that was about our level as well, which was really helpful. So I remember working out how many bananas you'd have to eat to actually get radiation poisoning. And it sort of it became an amount that you'd have to eat so many that you'd die of not breathing before you'd get radiation poisoning.

Clancy The important facts and important facts.

Molly Yeah, yeah.

Anne No, I just think it's quite a fun exercise to, I'm definitely not a scientist or even science inclined person, but I think that to understand something, the best exercise you can do is to explain it to someone else. And so trying to take some of these concepts and then demonstrating them on stage or explaining them to your audience, then it's only then that you really have to do get it yourself. So it was quite fun exercise for me.

Molly Yeah, I think I was just going to say that, like, for me it was I think we always knew, like, it's not, it's our first time making like a show about something so strictly science, let's say. But, you know, we forayed into like medicine and kind of environmental science before. So we're no strangers to like tackling things that we know absolutely nothing about. But I think for me, what it really highlighted was that like. Physics, you know, people that work in physics are they have to be so creative because essentially it is an imaginary exercise and I mean, in the nicest possible way, like theatre is imaginary, you know, like you create the worlds and they have to create the worlds of the thing to even like, you know, pose that it exists, whereas like the consequences of us creating our imagined worlds, that everyone has a great time, hopefully, and enjoys some some kind of like fulfilling like moment with us in a space. But the consequences of their imagined moments are massive. And if they get that wrong, then, you know, like they're in big trouble. So I think it's, it was really interesting. You know, they have to creatively problem solve. You can't, without seeing it. So it's basically like working blind and they have no idea, like, you know, like how exactly all these things are going to form, which I think is completely incredible and really brave and requires so much kind of foresight. And, you know, I think there's a common misconception that, yeah, scientists are like very kind of set in their ways and strict and mathematical. And of course, there is that approach. But you could argue that you get that in puppetry because, you know, we don't spend hours making puppets how to walk just because it's fun. So I think it was really nice to kind of see that the excitement as well that they get from these kind of explorations and align that with all kind of excitement that we get when we kind of work out how to show something in a way that's interesting.

Clancy So how much did the story change from the first rehearsal to the final show?

Molly So many times, who can actually remember?

Hattie Well.

Molly So much that when we go back to doing this film, I have no idea which version my brain will come out with first.

Hattie Yeah, I kind of want to turn that question back on you Clancy, what do you think's changed?

Clancy From when I first started on the project, which was a bit after you guys started. I think there was like some elements of like espionage and there was a lot of focus on almost like it felt almost like a thriller. But I think as we went along, it really developed into something that felt a lot more intimate and that we could deal with kind of the more personal arc that Kate goes through, which is nice, because I think that feels a little more timeless. And it's amazing that some of the issues that we were looking at, Kate, facing back in the 80s is exactly the same things that so many of us felt we could identify with in the rehearsal room in, you know, twenty nineteen. So, um, I just think that we really developed the art to really look at what issues are still important. And that's quite exciting, I think.

Molly and Hattie Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Clancy Or depressing.

Molly This came up the other day and I was saying that one of the things I think that has been critiqued about the show, which I found interesting, is the everyday ness of it. But I'm like, but isn't that the point? Like, you know, we didn't choose to go for this, like, Hollywood narrative around these kind of, you know, like these big dramatic things that we, we chose to play much more of the like. This is how every day and it's very subtle and it's very like kind of constant, this constant undermining and not listening and constant threat of like whatever. And I feel like it's interesting that, you know, that that got picked up quite a lot on the first tour and we were like, cool. But, you know, it's still, it's still a reflection of what's happening. And I think sometimes it's harder to tell those narratives because it forces people to kind of look at the reality of the situation or their own situation rather than dismiss it is going, "What a great story. Let's leave that story on stage".

Clancy Yeah, because you can't resolve it. I think there's a lot that Kate gets to resolve, but that's an audience. I think we still might feel we haven't gotten to resolve it for ourselves.

Molly Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Clancy So on the topic of like if this was an exciting, thrilling movie, if Flux was a film, who would play Kate and what do you think would happen in the sequel?

Molly So I've got a few options. So I was thinking and of course, you have to imagine them transformed with a dark hair, perm and big glasses because that's a given. They won't have that before they do this film. So I was thinking something like Emily Blunt or Amelia Clarke, because I feel like they might get the quirk. The quirky British-ness, or but maybe they're like, too cutesy... Okay Anne is wagging her finger (laughter)

Clancy Anne says no!

Anne I'm completely against them.

Molly So they they're in one category. Next category of person is someone more like Claire Foy, who played the queen in the crown, or Carey Mulligan, so someone a bit less shiny, like, you know what I mean? I don't mean any disrespect to Claire Foy or Carey Mulligan, but they're less like prim and proper.

Anne Pretty shiny though!

Hattie Yeah

Molly And my third option

Clancy I don't know who any of these people are

Molly My third option and this is my wild card. But then I was like, if you don't get this reference, then everyone will judge me, including everyone listening to this. So I'm sorry, I like trash. What can I say? Her name is Claudia Jessie. She's from Bridgerton. She plays Eloise in Bridgerton. Has anyone anyone seen that?

Hattie Hang on. Which one is Eloise?

Molly She's so on the Daphne side of the family, she's the sister who who who is a bit of a feminist.

Hattie Yes. Yes.

Molly So that's where I'm at with my casting for Flux the movie. (Laughter)

Clancy Do we have any contesting options? Anne seemed to have some opinions?

Anne Well, I don't want to I've not thought this through, so I feel I can't criticize if I don't have a backup option. But I just think that all of your options are so like.... perfect, do you know what I mean?

Molly Yeah, they are.

Anne Which, Kate is perfect in our own ways, but I was imagining but now I feel like if I suggest someone it's going to sound like them trashing them, well, but I obviously love Kate and I think they're great, but maybe someone like a young Tilda Swinton, you know.

Hattie Oh, nice.

Molly I love Tilda Swinton but yes.

Anne I love Tilda Swinton.

Molly I see what you mean. Yeah, I think it's hard, isn't it? Because it's like their presentation, a lot of these actresses because of what the industry demands of them, not of their own choosing, I'm sure, but it demands that very polished presentation, doesn't it? So, you know, we could do that in our movie.

Hattie I mean, let's be honest. Visually, aesthetically, it should be Gemma. Our colleague.

Molly Yeah we've already cast it and she's not, she's not an actress and she doesn't work in movies. But apart from that, she's perfect.

Hattie Yeah, I was thinking, but I think it's just because of the hair. But also she's a bit quirky. Do you know, the comedian Rose Matafeo?

Molly Oh yes. I love her. She would be ace. Okay I'm convinced, she's in, if she's up for it as long as she can do. I was thinking also about a versatile actor who could do, like, funny, quirky, like kind of I'm I'm a bit silly, Kate. But also, like, snotty crying. I'm very upset Kate. It's a very it's a very complex role. So they'd have to do a good job.

Hattie Yeah, great. Yeah. We didn't talk about the sequel, but

Anne I think the sequel, she becomes a spy and she goes to the USSR.

Clancy In the sequel, we sell out!

Anne And then there's a big explosion. And, you know,

Clancy I want to think of a clever, clever title for the sequel Flux 2 just is not it. But, you know, if anyone comes up with something better anyway, back to the world of theatre, what do you love about playing your role or what do you find most challenging about playing your? Anne I know you love being down on your knees, that's really nice for you isn't it, and you know which muscles hurt the worst, that's important to know.

Anne Um, let's say that it's not even so much which muscle hurts the most, but it did take a while to get used to this sort of like crouched down position for the entire length of the show. So there's several strategies within it. Actually, I think Molly is more on her knees whereas I'm more of a little picture of a crouching frog. But yeah, I'd say what's difficult is that you're trying for the audience to forget that you're there in some ways. But you so you're sort of like really close to the floor and making yourself really small. But at the same time, you have to be really aware of what's happening up top. And, and Molly and Hattie who are doing the head and the top body. Um, so it's quite a fun exercise to try to be working together as an ensemble while not always being able to see what the others are doing. So it's a lot of feeling.

Hattie Yeah.

Anne Which we like. Yeah.

Molly I think for me my worst thing it caused me so much stress is the shadows, the shadow puppets and the injuries I get from the shadow puppets. You'll guys will remember this, I literally. So yeah. Like so the shadow puppets are beautiful of course and I love how they look otherwise we literally wouldn't have them in the show because I would have pulled them into tiny pieces.

Hattie That's a shout out to Lydia Markham, who did the design.

Molly Yeah beautiful design from Lydia. Yeah. Say they've got like piano wire, which is like very stiff wire and they've got hooks and that there's like a little sort of rope thing. Like and everything hangs off of them when they're sort of big shadows. And sometimes I just get in such a pickle because, like, when I take them down and I can't see it's dark. And yeah, one show, like the little hooks just got like caught in my arms. And then I was like, oh. And then they got to the end of the show and Hattie was like, why is that blood everywhere? And I'm like, why is there blood everywhere? And I was like, eurgh why is there blood everywhere. I don't know, oh it's me. And I was literally like doing like a Franko B like kind of all over the stage as a result of these shadow puppets. And I don't know what it is about

me and shadow puppets. Everyone else seems to remain entirely unscathed by them. But obviously something that I just can't work out in my head that I just end up like with them stabbing me and everything all over my body. So that's my least favorite part of the show, that fight. And I think my favorite part of the show is. Yeah, like working together, but also like I love the music, like it really, I find it really enjoyable to, like, listen to the score, like as we do the show because it helps me to a know what we're doing. But also it's just it's fun and yeah, it's kind of yeah. It's nice to get into it and move move things around to it.

Clancy Jon's tunes, they are bangers.

Molly Yeah.

Clancy What would you say are your favourite moments in the show itself?

Molly My favorite bet, and it's going to come as no surprise, it's just that it is the best bet in the show, I think is the love montage. So this is where I won't spoil it because we've got to be careful here. And Kate meet's this love interest. And basically it's a series of kind of like montage scenes with them in. But when I'm going to when I do my podcast with Jon, I'm going to make sure that I sing him all of the alternative lyrics. So none of our music has lyrics in, but we make them up on tour and they're really good and he doesn't know about this So I'm going to surprise him with that tomorrow. And yeah, so the music and not that it's really is kind of timed because it's like, you know, and it's all these like kind of fake 80s pastiche type tunes. And the action that goes with it is very funny and it's very like it's deliberately sort of very cheesy and like tongue in cheek. So that's my favourite bit of the show.

Hattie That is a great choice. I have to say you. It's really fun.

Anne It's more fast paced. It's good fun. I think my favourite but sort wasn't touched on earlier, but without spoiling it. Um, Kate is going through a bit of a hard time, the way I see it, the timing sort of slows down and it's a bit of a cinematic zoom on Kate and that I think to just sort of tension between Hattie, Molly and I being huddled around Kate the puppet. For me, it feels like this thing of solidarity and like breathing strength into the character, which is quite moving as a performer, especially with with puppetry, there is a funny thing of the technicality of that, where half of the time when you're on stage of thinking about two steps to the right, I grab that drop, move it for forward. And it's quite it's not so much about the emotion of the character, but just about the sort of, yeah, the technicalities of moving things around the stage. But for that one bit, I feel like there is a lot of coordinated breathing between the three of us. And then I think there is a sort of really beautiful moment where the three performers are sort of merging into this one. Inanimate puppet and bring, bringing it to life, which I think is hopefully works well, but it's very moving to perform.

Clancy I think these are all such good choices, guys. What do you want women to feel after seeing.

Hattie I want women to feel like they should be heard. And that there are people who are making space for them. And that those people who aren't, are wrong, essentially. Like I want, I don't expect them to sort of come out and punch the air and, you know, go and cool their boss and tell him to do one. But, but to just feel, I guess, the best word is empowered. It's a bit of an overused word, but now. But it's right for me.

Molly Yeah, I think and again, just not to keep going back to the same point, but just for people to acknowledge and recognize that the everydayness of these, these things like it's not OK because it happens to you every day, it's not OK because it happens to you every hour. It doesn't make it right. It doesn't mean that you don't you don't you shouldn't question it. It doesn't mean you can't question it. Like just because it's become part of your normal doesn't mean that it has to stay part of your normal forever and that you know, you can change it by making people aware. You know, I think there's lots of different levels in the show. You know, there's addressing the way that Kate is feeling like on a kind of friendly level with someone she's close to who isn't necessarily doing anything intentionally to harm her. And then there's obviously other narratives that are much more kind of strong than that. But I think that's a really good point, that it doesn't really matter what level it's on, whether it's someone you hate or whether it's someone you love and trust. If they're not respecting you and not hearing you, then you need to tell them not to do that, or it's OK to tell them not to do that.

Hattie Yeah, so we're going to take over the questioning now, aren't we Molly? Because Clancy and we want to know what your first or favourite memory of working with Smoking Apples is, and that can be inside or outside of the rehearsal room.

Molly I mean, this you know, this is Clancy has done international touring, something like 13 hour flights like. So, I mean, you have got a big, big and deep pool to go from baby, be kind to us.

Clancy I think the first time I met you were going back to first. It's like two hundred years ago, maybe in like 20... I don't know. It was definitely a Little Angel Theatre. And you guys were doing In Our Hands like way early in the process. And I was like, super shy, like, oh, God, they seem to know what they're doing so much know. And I was just like an awkward lighting technician. So that was kind of like ...

Hattie I remember you climbing the ladder in the Little Angell and just being really scared about that ladder. That's what I remember.

Clancy Oh yeah, because they have that free-standing ladder, like over the audience. And there was like spiders in the ceiling. And I was no, I was I was really not excited about this, but I also didn't want to be like, 'OH MY GOD, there's spiders in the ceiling' because I didn't know anyone so I was afraid of looking really awkward.

I'm just going to talk about one of my favorite memories that happened with Flux specifically because it was like the first bit of Flux that I'd seen. And this was after like a few years of working with you guys on CELL and on In Our Hands. And I think on the first day in Flux, I did, we went down into the basement of Shoreditch Town Hall and everyone was insane, like, you guys have been working in the dark for hours and hours, I think. And you you were trying to explain things to me. And nothing was I was like, I just don't understand. But then you turned off the lights and you did the atom sequence which when everyone sees that, they're going to be like, oh, my God, because it's just a mind blowing bit of theatre magic that's just so creatively done. And I just remember feeling like so grateful to be like in this room with these people doing this creative thing. So I just think it's so exciting, the kind of work and the kind of pictures that you guys put into, you know, explaining even just a little bit of science. And it's it's only a couple of minutes, but it makes everything really clear and it just looks so beautiful. Just knocked my socks off at the time and still does so good on you.

Hattie What about you, Anwar?

Anne It's quite difficult to follow that one isn't it?

Hattie Is it is it BNAD? Is it

Anne Ohhh, BNAD.

Hattie Is it the chocolate bar tour of the UK?

Anne That's a good one. Well, that's the thing is that I feel it's difficult to pick one because there's a lot of very exceptional silly moments and so I don't know if there is one that sticks out. It's a good amount silliness and it feels quite joyous to be able to, like, literally mess around the room with a group of very silly people all day long. And then before you know it some way or another, you end up doing that on stage in front of people. It's quite a privilege.

Hattie That's been really, really great and lovely to catch up with you both. I mean, we haven't actually seen you in person for like, for a year, over a year, so that's been pretty much it. Thank you very much for taking part in our podcast.

Clancy It's so nice to see you.

Anne So nice to see you.