

## **Artists in Conversation: Exploring the Creative Process**

Tuesday, February 27 at 7:30 p.m. CT

Featuring Aridy Nox, Aya Ogawa, and Janaki Ranpura

Facilitated by Pirronne Yousefzadeh

**Pirronne:** Thank you so much, Emily, and thank you so much to everyone for joining us and to this incredible group of artists that I feel deeply honored that I get to spend an hour in conversation with this evening. Thank you for giving your time amidst your many commitments and your busy schedules.

Welcome welcome to everybody, I'm Pirronne Yousefzadeh, my pronouns are she/her and I'm the interim associate artistic director here at Playwrights' Center, well not here technically, this is my apartment, but at the Playwrights' Center and I want to begin as we always do by acknowledging that we are on the traditional land of the Dakota people and the Anishinaabe Ojibwe people. We offer our gratitude to this land for the privilege of gathering and connecting and for the work of Native and Indigenous activists past, present, and future who steward this land and who challenge us to be partners rather than owners of it. If you'd like to learn more about the incredible Native community organizations providing resources and support here in the Twin Cities, please go to the land acknowledgement page on our website. I also just want to add that since our activities are being shared digitally to the internet, that I'd like us to take a moment to consider the legacy of colonization embedded within our technologies, structures, and ways of thinking and the fact that the way that we are connecting here virtually leaves us significant carbon footprint contributing to the climate change that disproportionately affects Indigenous peoples worldwide. Given all of that I hope we can make good use of this time together and consider, continually consider our roles in decolonization and reconciliation.

And with that I want to take a moment now to make some space for our wonderful panelists here to introduce themselves and tell us a bit about their artistry and so I am going to pass it here to AriDy, and AriDy, welcome welcome, tell our wonderful audience a bit about you.

**AriDy:** Yeah, I'm AriDy Nox, they/them pronouns, of course like I usually know what unceded land I'm on, but right now I'm going not be able to find it because I'm in Brooklyn and sometimes I remember that Brooklyn is not the same unceded land as Manhattan so it might be the Lenape, but it also might, I might be wrong. I, and then I think just a little bit about me as an artist is, so I'm a storyteller. I work in multiple mediums, but I think the medium I'm most drawn to right now is theater and I really believe in theater as an embodied craft, as a place for us to invite people to practice the world that they want to see or even the world they don't want to see so that we can collectively shape the world that we want to live in. Yeah, do I like popcorn it? I can popcorn it to Aya.

**Aya:** Thank you, AriDy. Hello hello, my name is Aya Ogawa, I go by she or they pronouns. I am calling from the land of the Lenape people, AKA Brooklyn, so where you are, AriDy. I identify as a theater maker and that kind of comprises a range of things. Primarily I am a writer, divisor, director, sometimes I am a

performer, oftentimes I am a producer, and I am also a translator of theatrical scripts from Japanese into English. And I will pass it on to Janaki. I hope I'm saying that correctly.

**Janaki:** I'm so excited, I know, I put my pronunciation instead of my pronouns which are she/her in fact, but thank you, Aya, it worked and you did it perfectly. So it's interesting this, the land acknowledgement, Pirronne, that you kicked us off with, I feel like it I need to address that as well so I'm calling from Santa Fe, which is also White Shell Water Place, which is Ogha Po'oge which is also the land of the [inaudible] or northern and southern Tewa people, Tewa actually, and one of the reasons I'm here is because of that, is because I came making sculpture. I make objects and art and work as a playwright and work also as Aya was saying as a theater maker in general and as AriDy was saying as a storyteller and all kinds of media, and the stories that I found embodied here in this land talking about physicality and embodiment, the forms I've found here are while I'm here now as I'm talking to you all.

**Pirronne:** Thank you so much Janaki and everyone, thanks for your introductions and just for a little bit of context for everyone who's joining us. AriDy and Janaki were both at the Center in January working on their pieces in our In the Lab series, which is a series really dedicated to artists who are interrogating process and form and who are working on something that may be in a more nascent stage of development, in its sort of beginning and Aya also happened to be in Minneapolis in the month of January performing in their incredible piece *The Nosebleed* and so we do this series of Artists in Conversation throughout the year and of course every conversation is as unique as the artists who are participating in them and I thought what better, what could possibly be better than to bring these three incredible visionaries together to talk about process and to talk about making work that maybe comes together outside of the box of what we, what sort of the traditional models of of writing might, that we're familiar with and that we're accustomed to I think is in in the sort of mainstream American theater, and what does that look like? And so just wanted to offer a little bit of that context and to say that, you know I'm as interested in hearing from y'all about the questions that I put together as I am probably more interested in the questions you have for each other, because I think like any sort of generative process I've ever experienced, what happens in the room is always a different kind of magic even than what I planned ahead of time.

So with that being said, you know given that you all came off of these really stunning sharings here in the Twin Cities, I'd love to hear you each talk about these pieces a little bit, and I'm going to switch things up, and Janaki, I'm gonna actually ask you to start and tell us a little bit about *Cyranoid* and what inspired it and yeah, the genesis of of this piece.

**Janaki:** Sure, so I did a week In the Lab on *Cyranoid* which is an adaptation of *Cyrano de Bergerac* employing ChatGPT, and what was great about In the Lab is it gave me a chance to try to make the technology a character with Peter Morrow's help, who is really great as a technician and like very present in allowing the tech part to not be just the tech part in terms of writing. And I worked with an ensemble of six people and then basically, I kind of roped in our, the leadership team that I was working with, the dramaturg and the director to be on stage, as well as the, Peter, who was the technician and Emily, who was the stage manager, so we kind of had a team of 10 in the end, and worked really on a devising

process, so I leaped into the unknown because it was an opportunity to do so and really drew on my background in lecoq theater and devising in that mode to, I had pages, I had worked on the story, and I'll talk about that in a second in terms of genesis of the idea, but really kind of threw it all away and worked with that team, and that was that was pretty cool, so that's just a context of like what actually happened in January.

And the reason I was working on that is because, do you see my nose? So I've been really interested in my own nose for a long time. Some people work on navel gazing, I work on the nose. And the reason is because as I was growing up in Southern Ohio, we were the only non-white family basically like anywhere, we moved around a lot but that was always the case. Not surprisingly in a way with like mobily ambitious, upward mobily ambitious immigrant parents who want to be were there's more opportunity and more wealth so that ended up putting us in those sorts of situations at that time when I was growing up, and the fact that I wasn't always received in a way that made sense to me, I attributed to the fact that like I couldn't see my nose and it was my nose that everyone was reacting to in this slightly stilted and bizarre way. And I'm not the only one to work on the nose, clearly you know there's Gogol and William Kentridge and well Edmund Rostand with *Cyrano*, so because of this long-standing interest one of my friends took me to see, there's a really great playwright. I think this will end up backward, won't it, Alexi Michalik, and he wrote this play about the genesis of *Cyrano de Bergerac* from the perspective of its playwright, so that's Edmund Rostand, and my friend took me to see that play and I had just that, and that was in Paris after I had just spent some time in New York renting the apartment of a friend of a friend who happened to work for OpenAI, so I was sort of like putting these ideas together and in, and in a moment kind of came up with the desire to make that adaptation. That enough for now?

**Pirronne:** That's great, that's great, I'd love to pass it to Aya to tell us a bit about the genesis of *The Nosebleed*.

**Aya:** I really loved listening to what Janaki was describing. Yeah, so fun.

So *The Nosebleed* is a play that I wrote and directed, and it's an autobiographical play about my relationship with my father who is long dead, and in the play, which is performed by an ensemble of six people, four actors play me, they play Aya, they play different versions of me, and I play my son and my father. And actually if, I think that, I don't know if you kind of reverse engineer or just like take the script of *The Nosebleed*, it seems, I don't know, it to me, it seems like a pretty normal play, like a play, I mean there might be some unusual things about it, but it's you know, it's a script, but in order to arrive there, I actually took quite a roundabout devising, creative, generative process because actually like I never wanted to write an autobiographical play, like that just seemed horrifying. I also never wanted to write about like really embarrassing and humiliating things that happened to me, like who would want to do that? And I never wanted to like put myself in the play, but what happened was, the presidential election of 2016 is what happened, and I had been planning to begin a process of creating a new play a day or two after the elections took place, and often when I begin a piece or begin a process, I don't know a lot about what I'm gonna make. Sometimes I have an idea for a story or an idea for a character, but for this project the only thing that I knew was kind of like the large umbrella theme, and the theme was failure,

and I was kind of in a place where the idea of failure was looming over me, like I'm like how much longer can I be writing plays that nobody gives a shit about and you know, like how how much longer can I possibly be doing this? And feeling like a failure and being called a failure, so this word was kind of floating around in my life, and I was like, what does that actually mean like we don't have space to talk about it, or I felt like I didn't have space to talk about it, and I needed the help of my friends, like my collaborators, and so I was planning to create a space for us to collectively talk about failure and what what does it mean and how much control does it have over us and can we kind of change the framing around it?

But then I really feel like the election put a different spin on what I set up as the kind of prompt for the process. Because it it was such a moment that felt like such a societal fracture moment. I mean, looking back now it doesn't seem that surprising, but in that moment it felt like, oh my God I don't understand where I'm living anymore, like I don't understand the community that I'm living in anymore. Can I trust my neighbor? Like I don't know what they're think, I don't know what they think of me and I felt like I needed and my communities needed a place of healing, a place of forgiveness, a place of empathy, so as I worked with my collaborators and by work, I mean kind of sharing failure stories, embodying each other's failure stories, playing with people's failure stories, so like displacing the narrator or having multiple storytellers or multiple protagonists existing within a story, it became clearer and clearer to me how I needed to structure the play in order to get to a place where the performers and audience were able to open their hearts to each other in the same room. And then at a certain point of exploring, I felt that I had to take responsibility for the vulnerability that I was asking my actors and my audience members to join me in and I, my way of taking responsibility was to take what I learned during this kind of creative, generative stage and apply it to autobiography and in that way, you know I'm there taking taking responsibility, giving permission for these actors to play me etc., etc., so that's kind of the the big picture of *The Nosebleed*.

**Pirronne:** Great, thank you so much, and there's a lot more to dig into what you and Janaki have already shared, but I want to pass the mic now to AriDy and tell us a bit about *bayou*, and yeah, how you approached that week in the room, what you came in with, and what you were inspired by, and what you were exploring.

Yeah, okay, I, so I guess the genesis of *bayou* as an idea really lies in this play series I'm trying to write. It's seven plays which I believe it's called a heptology, that is the word I've been given, but I keep forgetting to Google and confirm. And I had already I've already written one of the plays in the series and it's like smack dab in the middle chronologically, and it like brought up all these questions for me about some of the characters in the play and the world that they were living in, so I decided to go back and and write the first play chronologically which is *bayou*, and the series follows the matrilineal line of these villagers and their relationship with the goddess who safeguards and occasionally terrorizes their village, and her name is Mother Bayou, and they are the Amalades and the like, the original Amalade is Cove, who is the first priestess of Mother Bayou. So *bayou*, so that's you know like, big big big, like I don't have all the middle because I haven't written the plays big picture, and then *bayou* is really this story of this baby goddess who is just being born who's really in the middle of being born and coming into being, who

decides that one, she wants to exist and two, she wants to strike out into the world and find herself and her mother slash her former self is this river that's very old, that's been sustaining this huge community, and she manifests as a stream that goes off and on her own way, but the villagers who worship her mother see this and some of them think that she is her mother striking off on a new path and they're like we are the most about about, we are the coolest, we are going to follow this stream because we're brave and we and we wanna, and they follow the stream and they end up in this situation where they don't have any resources other than the stream, which is not enough resources and so they're praying to their goddess and who they get, is Little, who is the baby goddess and she's just like I don't, could y'all stop praying so loudly?

And this is really what we worked on in In the Lab. Her first encounter with Cove who ends up being her High Priestess, is to just be like could you stop praying so loudly, I'm trying to be, I'm trying to figure myself out and and the the prayer thing is very distracting and through that interaction they realize what's happened, that they thought they were following their goddess but actually they've been following her, and now they're too far away from their original goddess to survive by themselves, so they petition her for help and she's like, nah, they're like maybe not, no I don't really want to be responsible for humans, thanks. And so it becomes this negotiation of of like whether or not Little is going to become their their goddess and whether or not Cove can actually take care of this village even amidst her life and In the Lab really started off as a, it's funny, I think like in my mind it was a technical experiment of there, it's a, *bayou* is a play with music because Little is a water goddess, she hears a lot of the world musically in sound, and so she has a series of monologues really almost soliloquies that she delivers that are undergirded by a cappella music, and I wanted to see if that worked/made sense so, it's like I'm going to go to In the Lab I'm going to test the monologue.

But I think this came up for me, Aya, when you were talking about failure, I actually think what I was really trying to test was how comfortable I could be as a composer in the room. I have an MFA musical theater writing but I was a words person, and I had opportunities to kind of play around with composing, but I didn't have, I still don't have a lot of confidence in it. I'm not a trained musician, I just was very, have always been very nervous about it and I think getting my MFA made it a little worse because then I was surrounded by a lot of really deeply, classically trained or incredibly talented like virtuoso musicians and I was like, yeah no I can't, I cannot do that but music's good is like consistently coming to me, I've been like singing to myself since I was in middle school. I've always kind of made my own music without instruments and *bayou* is really my first time kind of formalizing that being like, these are songs that people will perform and it will be in a piece, and even though I don't write sheet music we're going to do it and and see if it works. And it was really beautiful. Isabella Dawes who is our music director, without me telling her to was like, yeah I think this music's in the body so we're not going to look at the page we're actually just going to listen to the demo that AriDy has created and then we're going to learn it and then we're going to practice it over and over until we've got it and that was exactly the process I wanted, and it was like such a relief to not have to request it, because I was so nervous about requesting it. I was worried about the burden it was going to be putting on Isabella but also the actors, and it was actually really freeing to like be in the rehearsal room and watch what it was for people to learn music the way like I kind of learned music when I was in church choir, or like how I learned music when I was like small,

which is just to listen to it over and over, how even we learn like pop songs now, it's not like I learn a pop song by looking at the sheet music and then singing the pop song, it's definitely me singing it over and over, and how doing that together created like the village in the rehearsal space, in this really tangible, material way that by the end of it I was like yeah this is how we learn the music. Like, if I had any doubts about whether or not I want to get an arranger, get someone to really put this on paper in a way, I now just really want to encourage people to learn it communally and for it to be like our first group project is to learn the songs together and that doing that is part of the peace because a lot of the peace is about the village learning how to become a village instead of refugees from a village to become their own village in their own right and Little to become a goddess in her own right and to find community with each other. Yeah.

**Pirronne:** Yeah, and that was just like one of the things I was so struck by was you know, on the night of the sharing, and not to make this whole Artists in Conversation about like, sorry y'all, you missed something great, is like, is the fact that like no two ensembles would sort of ultimately execute that music identically because of the sort of iterative way in which it was learned and it was like ensemble based and driven while also you know being rooted in the structure of like the demo that you provided.

And you know, you sort of like segued us beautifully, AriDy, to like the next kind of phase of conversation, which is you know, I often find the beginning of any sort of generative process a little terrifying personally, so maybe this is my selfish question to ask you all to demystify the beginning for me a little bit, or maybe there's no way to do that, but to talk more about, I'd love to like explore a little bit more the things you come into the room with that you say started with Cyranoid, for instance, the prompts or there was you know, tons of questions and text on the walls, Janaki, and just wondering about like how, yeah, how do you start, how do you sort of follow the scent of what then is exciting in the room, like what's the sort of, I mean, the impossible question, what is the the balance between preparation and then discovery? And I'll stop talking and I'd love to hear, Janaki, you talk a little bit about that.

**Janaki:** Yeah, it's interesting, of course it's very normal that we're talking about a lot of the same key points all of us all together, and so there was structure that I came in with. I worked quite a bit on the structure of the play in order not to use it or to use it, but essentially like I had diagrams and pages and scenes and I had really worked out quite well in my mind the shape of this thing. And I'm not a musician but I do work a lot with rhythm, right, so like I kind of had a sense of the timing of the thing. This was not a thing that was sharable, it wasn't in a sharable, it wasn't in a form if that if I had shared it it would have been useful, so that was something that I was sort of keeping there, and the leap that I made is to go ahead and just steal steal steal, so I stole a structure that I had learned from Improbable theater. I saw Phelim McDermott do Tao of Glass at the Skirball in New York last spring, and so, and Improbable has been on my radar for a long time as a puppeteer. Most of my work in the theater world has been in puppetry and also incorporating physical theater into that, and so I got the chance to work with them last summer and they were doing something that was so strange to me. I was invited to come to think about part of this play.

So the nugget of this play that I feel is critical and still evades me because it is the critical thing, is why it matters that our computer-generated technology or personalities have no bodies. To what degree does it matter? So we're talking a lot all of us here about embodiment and being in the room sharing vulnerability and community, and how is it that we can engage in technology in a way that incorporates it into our communities and yet it doesn't have the limitations and the terrors and the fragility of a body? So what does it mean to be embodied?

So when I went to Improbable's workshop, they used a thing called Open Space Technology and I thought I was working on how does the, how does the AI character die if it doesn't have a body? I thought that's what I was working on, but actually what ended up happening is using Open Space Technology, you start to ask questions, you start to ask questions like more or less what they were doing is, what am I here to get? Why am I here with these other people? What are they here to get? And you start to get more granular with these sorts of questions over time and you do that in a public witnessing way in a certain sense, like they aren't questions that you hold personally, they're questions that you open up and share, and hence, Pirronne, all of those papers all over the walls. The question because we had limited time I wanted to get people asking was, what does it mean to be embodied? So actors are experts at this, this is their profession, to be embodied and to be vulnerable and to access that, so I knew they would have a lot of thoughts on it and they did, and so sort of right away anything that was in my mind was actually given to them, and it sounds like both of you know, AriDy and Aya, you both engage in this process it's like we all do it in different ways which is to turn over to the people in the room, how do we empower the the people who are there in the room to be as fully there present as they're able to be? And so the technique that I used for that was Open Space Technology.

And so, Pirronne, talking about beginning, I, it terrified me because it's really easy to be skeptical about starting with paper and words and markers. It's like sitting on the ground like kindergarteners and scrolling on pages when we're supposed to be doing theater. And I had never tried that process before but what I saw that it unlocked was, I still don't know all the mechanics of how it opens people up, but it's like a little key in a sardine can. Starting this way gets people talking from a much deeper place and Improbable theater have been doing it for a long time. They actually create a lot of their work by starting devising in this way. There's lots of theory around it, and deep democracy is another thing that underpins this, which is coming down to what is essence, so in terms of finding the heat, I basically was looking for where the people in the room were talking about things that matched the structure in my head and then I would say, that's it, go, let's try this. You know, and that's also like you know, I have 800 improv games in my head, like that makes me think of this improv game, let's try this, what comes out. And you know like with any artistic process I think you feel that moment when everyone's like something good happened, you know, you feel it. Okay, sorry, talked a lot. I'm done.

**Pirronne:** You did not talk a lot, you talk the perfect amount, and I also just before I pass the mic here to Aya, I just want to remind folks that we will have a Q&A portion here in just a little bit, so if in hearing these brilliant artists talk about their work, a question comes to your mind, feel free to pop it into the Q&A and we will come to that section of the discussion here in just a little bit. But, Aya, how did you start exploring failure? What was the sort of, what was the the initial, yeah sort of prompt or invitation to

your actors, and then can you also tell us a bit about the moment, if you remember, that made you sort of realize your own, the revelation that you needed to sort of put your own failure into the piece? Your own vulnerability into the piece?

**Aya:** Yeah, still kind of reeling from what Janaki was describing. Whenever you guys talk I'm like, what, so cool!

Yeah, so my prompt was so open-ended. I remember the first day of this workshop, there were maybe six or seven of us in a room sitting on the floor and we had just gone through this big societal event, and we were kind of sitting with each other and my prompt to my collaborators was to please share a failure story. And I didn't qualify it, so, and I would have these sessions every week, so basically I cast a wide net out to a bunch of collaborators and I said, hey I'm going to be in this rehearsal studio from this time to this time every Wednesday or Friday or whatever it was, and I'll bring a bunch of snacks. Whoever can make it and wants to make it, please join me and we're just gonna work. And I always started with please share a failure story. And so the stories varied. Sometimes they were about, you know, a very clear mistake or misstep. Sometimes they were about something stupid they did when they were young. Most of my collaborators were women or non-binary folk and I found that, I don't know if this is the reason, but there were a lot of sharings around physical, what they perceived as physical failure, like getting sick, having cancer, being infertile, or having a lot of miscarriages. Very very moving, deep, deep stories. And then I would take these stories and ask people to get into groups like duos or trios or sometimes more and to embody these stories, and what I found was that, and obviously this is all happening with the storyteller's consent, right, and when they were working with each other, I found that when the storyteller kind of released the story from themselves and allowed other people to embody their role in their story, something really interesting happened and I'm not exactly sure how to describe it. Part of it was maybe it, the story started to feel like it belonged to multiple people and that also as the listeners or witnesses to the story, there were more entry points. Even though the stories remain very very personal, there it it kind of opened up the portals inside the story in a way that I really loved and felt like it was the right direction for this piece.

So we played around with the structure for quite a while, maybe three months, five months, and then the last month or two months of my exploration, I began to invite audience members, audience members into the room and I structured it so that when an audience member came in, they would just be in a room with chairs in a circle and a bunch of people sitting in the chairs, so the audience didn't know who was a performer and who was an audience member and sometimes I invited audience members to share a failure story, or I gave them some text to read to another audience member, so it really kind of dissolved a lot of the barrier between who was a performer and audience.

But the the reason I pivoted it to autobiography is that I was finding that this structure and the the failure story circle, so to speak, was very successful in bringing everybody in the room to a place of of empathy and vulnerability, which is what I wanted, but at the end of the performance or the gathering, I kept getting the same question from the audience which was, was that story true? Was that story that you told about so and so true? Because so and so is not here right now, even though I always said this is



a true story about so and so or this is a fictitious fictional story about so and so. There was something about the audience questioning the veracity of what was happening that I found I didn't think was helpful for what I was trying to achieve. And that is where, that is when I was like, okay let me let me like hit pause on this for a second and it was right before summer vacation and you know, I have kids so summer vacation is like a whole thing and I wasn't going to be able to work, you know, rehearse in the same way, so I decided that I was going to take a few months away from what I had been exploring and just say, hey if I were to ask myself the same question that I've been asking all my collaborators for six months, how would I answer it? And this is also you know, I like to, I like to, I wanted, I felt like I wanted to give space to people, right, but I also reached a point in my thinking where I was like, well I have to I have to take responsibility for this very very vulnerable room, and I personally am not putting my like, my skin in the game and so maybe I have to do that, and maybe I have to model what it what this vulnerability is, and you know, so then also realizing, well if I'm going to do autobiography, like I have to be in the room and I have to hold the room and I have to give permission to my performers to play in it and for the audience to laugh at it, but I also can't play myself and I have to, I have to play the antagonist which is my father. So yeah, once I understood how I wanted to solve this problem, then the choices that followed were actually pretty simple, and not simple, but straightforward to me, like I understood what needed to happen in order to get there.

**Pirronne:** Yeah I feel like there's something in what you're talking about that like sort of feels like a series of scientific experiments, or you know, like I don't know, sometimes it feels a little bit like math to me too in terms of like, wait like the proof isn't quite working out yet, so and I also just am really struck by in different ways all of you have been sort of talk talking about sort of leaning into a kind of discomfort, an area that you're not sure you want to go in, or you're actually like you think you're very sure you don't want to go in, or a thing you're not sure you know how to do or can do, and that I don't know, I find very inspiring.

As far as, just to dig into this a little bit more deeply, AriDy I'd love for you to talk a little bit about your collaboration in the room also with Regina Victor, incredible director who worked with AriDy on both their In the Lab and also last season in PlayLabs on *A Wallless Church*, and sort of how how Regina in working with you brought that kind of like iterative exploratory sense to the process which we saw manifest I think so beautifully in a presentation that was very much an open rehearsal, and like really allowed us to see the layering of different ideas onto the actors?

**AriDy:** Yeah you're so psychic, I was going to bring that up. I think there, I, an answer to the initial question, I think in all rooms I'm in and so yeah, not even this room more than other rooms, in every room I'm in, maybe actually not for all my musicals because I do think sometimes that gets a little more strict, but in almost every playroom I'm in that I have like some control over how the room feels, what I prefer is for us to like, unbalance the default of the rehearsal room and for me, I think often the default of the rehearsal room for new work especially is like, there's a playwright who is our mystic play whisperer that will tell us what the sacred text says and if the sacred text changes, and the director is you know, the imperial god of the room. They will give us the direction. And then the actors are the

people who are going to do the things and the stage manager is going to make sure we do the things correctly, and there's like a lot of regimen and like specificity to the room.

I think a thing that me and Regina have a lot in common is like, this idea that like, the play is also kind of a group project, that is a thing that we are creating together and then that later we're going to invite the audience to help us create as well, that we're all equal co-creators in the room with different authorities and different expertise, and how to like open the room up to that energy, how to open it up to like people feeling comfortable asking questions and interrogating things and having opinions and knowing that like, just because that opinion doesn't like result in a script change doesn't mean we don't care about the opinion. It just means that it didn't result in a script change change this time. And how can it, and like democratic is a weird way to say it, but communal is actually what I usually land on. How can we make it an actual communal space? And Regina is like expert at this, I think, really good at getting into the room and getting everyone to the we're collaborators here very quickly, but I think in every room I'm in also, because it's not the default, every day is a reminder of it. Every day is like, I feel like the first, my intro for this piece in particular was like, I don't know if it's good, I don't, I have not sung in in person before, I have not shown these demos to other people, they could it could be very bad. I don't know if it works and I just want us all to be in that in that space of like, we do not have to learn this thing and pretend like it's good. Please help me figure out how to make it like work and like I think after like asking for that grace, also I think allowed people to have more grace with themselves, too, is I think there were moments where you know, you're working with professionals, like they're so good at what they do, and I think there are moments, I feel like especially with actors, where they're like, I want to get the thing right, I want it to be really good, that I came here to make your thing good, and so I think the thing we most often were saying was like, there is no good, like there is no good for this particular process. We just want to see if it works, so if it hurts your voice, let me know, because that means it doesn't work. If it's like drawing on the ears right now, it doesn't work, and like we can have this day to figure out if it doesn't work because we don't know it and it's not in our bodies yet, but like once it's in our bodies, if it's still not working it's not not working because you're doing it wrong, it's not working because it's in process, it's being created.

And like you were saying, Pirronne, I really do want there to be a way that every time it's going to be different because it's going to work differently for everybody, so I think that was a big part of the impulse. But I think to what Janaki was saying earlier, there is like a way that like, in terms of ironically, in terms of what you were saying about embodiment but also how the room was kind of run, I think there's a way that you have to get ahead of people's minds, like you have to like get them in a rhythm or like a speed slash pace where they forget to think about it, and it's for me, that's always the moment where the thing starts to happen, where it's like, okay now we're all in flow together and we can like feel through it rather than think through it, and for me the preparation part then becomes about what is the container that's going to best allow people to like, start to feel into it? And I feel like I'm not properly prepared when everyone has to think, like it's not that we're thinking because we're accustomed to thinking, it's because like there's not enough there for us to grab on to, so everyone is thinking very very hard. That's when I start to be like okay, I need to go back and write more pages or do the demo

differently or write something down. But like that for me is the only standard. If I have that much, then everyone can start to just be in the flow. Yeah, long answer.

**Pirronne:** Great answer. Thank you. That's really helpful. We're starting to get some questions, and so I'd love to shift us into some Q&A, and we have a really complex question that I, that is a great one and I think a lot for us to dig into here. We all know that work that is made sort of generatively like, it takes a long time and a lot of resource and that the modes of supporting that kind of work in the American Theater are few, and so I guess to try to distill this question, I'd love to hear y'all talk a little bit about like, how do you, how do you approach a piece with like an like the pragmatism of like parameters and budget and size and scale? And how much do you, how do you hold that and also how do you hold the artistic impulse and particularly at the beginning of a process where pragmatism can kill an impulse, you know or really or or squelch it, like how do you how do you sort of let the artistic idea make space for it to be its fullest version of itself? And knowing of course that like the realities of funding and capitalism and whatever are going to like show up at some point. I don't know if I distilled this question at all. AriDy, please save me.

**AriDy:** No no no, it's like my, the nonprofit in me is coming out. I think my automatic response, like the reason why I jumped in was because I think I always want to push back on the idea that pragmatism requires less creativity. I actually think it requires more. I think like when we start to face like budget problems, when we start to think about like, oh is this unethical? Is this like taking away from my very talented friends time? Then it's actually, like for me it's always like a space to slow down and be like, okay, if I don't have money, what do I have to offer that is worth this? What can I, like how can I, who can I ask that can coalesce in a way where the offering feels good and moral in and on all levels? What resource can I acquire, if I don't have cold hard cash, that still feels valuable? And I think the simplest like most cut down version for me is like, if I'm going to do a reading and I'm not going to pay people to come to the reading, but there are people who are going to be good at readings, can I feed them? Can I make sure that it's not going to be a million hours long? Can I make sure it's really easy for them to read and can I give them food so that they don't have to pay for food that night? And can I make it fun for us to hang out? So like we're hanging out, which we probably would have done anyway, people got food, great, and I get to hear my play aloud, and I mean like, I think that, and I think, I always have a vehement response to that because I think one of the things that capitalism really robs us of is our creativity. It starts to make us feel like we can't do things unless we can exchange a very specific form of capital, and that's just like not true, there are other ways to be in community and to be in ethical relationship with each other. It just might require a little bit more creativity than being able to pay someone. But also if you can pay someone, pay them.

**Pirronne:** AriDy, thank you for that reframing. Aya, tell us more.

**Aya:** Yeah no, just yes yes to everything AriDy was saying. I mean when I was, you know, like right post-college or you know starting out as an artist, there weren't, I had no, I had no resources, none of my friends had any resources, but we wanted to create work, you know, and we wanted to create work with each other, so I don't, you know, undervalue those relationships and what that means, you know. All of

my play, not all, most of my plays I would say began outside of any institutional relationship and that's probably like partially, you know, a failure of mine to be able to like engage with an institution in like a healthy way where I feel like my work isn't compromised, but I feel like when when I begin to play, I want it to be on my terms and I don't want somebody kind of hovering over me who I have to like consciously or subconsciously like be like, oh do you like it? Is this good? You know, I don't want that voice in the room at the beginning. So I feel very fortunate enough to have trusting relationships with a couple of places where I had free rehearsal space, you know, I had like 20 hours of rehearsal space. I was like okay, so then how can I how can I use this time as wisely as I can and if I don't have a budget per se and I can't hire people to be a consistent actor, then can I create a situation where people will want to gather whenever they can to help me work out these artistic problems I want to address and think about? And I feel like in a way like, that's the best, that's my favorite time in process when it's so open and there aren't kind of restrictions about like how much I need to achieve by a certain amount of time.

**Janaki:** All right, I'll give my two cents really quick. Oh, speaking about cents, value is a word that I was thinking about a lot ,and it goes back to some of the things well both of you were talking about, but AriDy particularly brought up the specter of capitalism – used to be the specter of communism, but we know the real truth – and so this idea that value comes in the form of US dollar bills is definitely not why anyone's in the room when you're working on an art project. People there's so, there's so, there's such a full entity of care and concern that wants to be there and find some true life force in the world. That is the value that we're looking for and at different points in the process, you can pay different amounts for that, so it's sort of like the money allows the art to happen, but it's not the reason why, it's never the reason why. And so I think that, I mean, we've all talked about that as well, like respecting the people in the room where we're at for the needs that we're at is why we're there.

**AriDy:** And I think in terms of how that translates to like when you pay them explicitly, because I think that was part of the question of like how do you know when you have to pay someone, I think for me the gauge is always like when would not paying them be a deep imposition upon their life? Like, when is asking someone to do a three-day workshop meaning that they're not able to like provide for themselves? That's when even if people are willing to do it that it gets really thorny and sticky and like maybe we need to fundraise money to me. But like if you can do it in an ethical way there there are ways to be creative about it for sure.

**Pirronne:** I think there's a lot more that we could talk about here and also I think you have all brought us to a perfect end right here at half past in a way that I think reminds us to continually trust in our collective imagination to build beyond the the limitations of what we've inherited. So thank you for that.

I just want to say a huge huge thank you to all of you for joining us and I'm ending this in my official capacity of course, you know, at the Playwrights' Center, but also as an AriDy and Aya and Janaki super fan. I'm just so inspired by all three of you and for whatever we say about the challenges of the American Theater, I think if we think about the artists who are part of the American Theater, it is doing just fine. So I want to also just take a moment to plug our next event at the Playwrights' Center. Steven Dietz began rehearsals today for *Vial Man (The Apothecary's Story)*, which he is also directing. It's the

last play in our Ruth Easton series, performing on Monday, March 4th and Tuesday, March 5th, and then available to stream the week of March 18th, so I hope you'll join us for that. Again huge thanks to AriDy, Aya, and Janaki, to all of you for joining us. Stay safe, stay healthy, and have a wonderful night. Thank you.

[End of video]