Anthea: Welcome to Sideshow on 2RPH. This is Anthea Williams and I'm thrilled that we're back for our 3rd season. We're gonna bring 12 episodes to you over 2025 and each time we'll be talking to an artist with a lived experience of disability about their creative work, how they put their careers together, and what makes them excited and inspired. You can listen to this radio show on 2RPH or you can download it as a podcast, It's available on all major podcasting apps. There's also a transcript which is made available through the Accessible Arts New South Wales website.

Today we're joined by Ali Murphy-Oates. Ali is a Ngiyampaa Wailwan person. They work as senior manager at Create New South Wales and as producer, First Nations at the Sydney Festival. Previously, they were executive producer and managing director at Moogahlin Performing Arts, among many other awesome things that they've done. Hey, Ali, thank you so much for joining us.

Ali: Very happy to be here, thank you.

Anthea: So, I have to say, I absolutely adore your LinkedIn profile and I adore the read receipt email that I get back from you when I send you a message. Can I read our audience the beginning of your LinkedIn profile?

Ali: Oh, no... Yeah, sure. Go for it.

Anthea: It... I love it, it is so good. Guys, you're in for a treat. "IMPORTANT: I DO NOT USE LINKED IN OFTEN. It does my head in and it's quicksand for my ADHD brain. Please don't message me on here. My freelance email is available in 'contact details' above. I will also not read your articles or blog posts, so please don't be offended in real-life when I ha- say I haven't seen it. Anyway, here's my out-of-date bio." I love it.

Ali: (Laughs).

Anthea: It's so honest. It is the best, the absolute best LinkedIn bio I have ever read. Can you tell us a little bit about what led you to write that?

Ali: Yeah, sure. Um, it's just the honest truth. Uh, I think I went on LinkedIn for the first time in a year a couple of years ago. Realized that I had missed a whole bunch of messages and connection requests and other things, because really, I go to LinkedIn to update my CV. And it is an online version of my CV when I lose my CV in my Google Drive somewhere and cannot find it. Uh, and so I thought, "Oh, gosh, how do I create a stop measure here as I do have in a few other digital places as well?" My email auto-response being another one where I just set the expectation of how people can communicate with me where I don't feel like I'm letting anyone down at the same time.

Anthea: I love it. But I also love how casual and how honest it is. I- I just think for people who are neurodivergent that's the way forward. We just need to be honest about who we are and what works of our society and what doesn't. So, like, thank you for being such a leader in that way.

Ali: Oh, I don't know if, uh, leadership is the way that I would put that but I do think that it's an interesting intersection between neurodiversity and indigeneity. Where I think about, um, professionalism as something that really centers, um, a- a European way of behaving that I don't... I have not been raised in and I do not subscribe to. Um, and so, uh, in all ways that I try to present myself in my personal, professional, online, whatever life, uh, I am trying to, uh, just, um, present myself the same way across all of those platforms. And not try to code switch or be a different person in a different place. And definitely not be, uh, uncomfortable in a different place either. Does that make sense?

Anthea: Yeah, it makes perfect sense but it also makes me think that you're being professional by being authentic, and isn't that the best way to be professional? (Laughs).

Ali: Sure, some would think (laughs).

Anthea: Yeah.

Ali: I do think it gets me in trouble where, um, I ca- have a tendency to maybe be too honest, um, maybe use language that is too casual. Maybe also use language that is too self-... oh, gosh, what's the word? Um, I wanted to say defecating but that's not it.

Anthea: Oh, um.

Ali: That is not it. (Laughs).

Anthea: Yeah, no it's not. It's self-depreciating.

Ali: Thank you. Where, then folks go, "You can speak about yourself, you know, you don't have to put yourself down." And I say, "I'm not putting myself down. I'm being honest about who I am and what my capacity is. Um, and my capacity is not also my limitations."

Anthea: Yeah.

Ali: Yeah, my neurodiversity gives me a certain set of skills, a certain way of communicating and I work best when I work within that capacity, not outside of it.

Anthea: Yeah, that makes perfect sense to me, and you've had so much success in your career, so clearly that works. So, can you tell me... You just went all [inaudible 00:05:15] then and you were, like, "I'm not going to agree with you."

Ali: I disagree. We're doing a Zoom interview here, folks, and the face I pulled just said, "Nah." (Laughs).

Anthea: It was great, it was great. It was, like, "I don't, I'm not going to agree with that." I was, like, "You're really successful."

Ali: (Laughs).

Anthea: So, tell me, how did you find performance and how did you get into working in the arts?

Ali: Oh, I have always been a kid who was drawn to performance and drama but not necessarily a kid who was performing center-stage. Uh, I have two younger siblings. We used to put on shows for our parents on our back patio, where I would be directing and stage managing. Um, I also, uh, my sister's gonna hate me for saying this but, um, I wrote out contracts so that they wouldn't use my stuff, as kids.

Anthea: (Laughs).

Ali: And I think that's a very early indication of arts administration there (laughs).

Anthea: It's so great.

Ali: Um, (laughs) but when I was a teenager we went to see, uh, Bangarra. Uh, and it was Bangarra's Corroboree, uh, and I remember I saw, uh, b- the beautiful Brolga solo in that, was absolutely captured by it. And then I think there was an intermission, Bangarra people please don't correct me if I'm wrong there, um, and when we came back the stage was completely clear, it had completely transformed. And I remember something ticking over for me then and going, "I wanna know how they did that." And that has been the thing that drove me, uh, through the rest of my teenage years and the early 20s was, wanting to know how things come together in the performing arts and, uh, being part of the facilitation of that.

Anthea: Yeah, fantastic. That's really cool. And at the moment you're working at the Sydney Festival. So, can you tell us a little bit about what's coming up? Because I know this is your first Sydney Festival as First Nations producer so I wanna hear all about it.

Ali: Absolutely, yes. Uh, I'm really excited, I get to work with the amazing Jake Nash as creative artist in residence at Sydney Festival. We've also got my deadly brother, Neville Boney who's another Wailwan and Wiradjuri person, as associate producer, and together we get to present the Blak Out program within the Sydney Festival. Uh, that is all of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and international First Nations shows.

Uh, so the festival is kicking off with Radical Son performing in the ACO Neilson On The Pier. Uh, he's performing, uh, he is launching his album Bilambiyal, uh, there and that's our... the beginning of our music program down at The Thirsty Mile in Walsh Bay. We also have, over at the Opera House in our opening weekend, Cliff Cardinal, uh, our, uh, brother from Channel Island, a native, uh, Canadian-American performer doing As You Like It or The Land Acknowledgement, um, a radical retelling of Shakespeare with a twist. You'll have to come and see to find out. Uh, and then of course we've got-

Anthea: As You Like It's actually my favorite Shakespeare.

Ali: Oh, true.

Anthea: Yeah. I absolutely love it. I think it's, um... you know, 'cause I'm not really that much of a classics person. I- I love stories that are new, that- that are made new and that are about what's going on in the world now. But I just love the playfulness of As You Like It and I love the way that they, you know, they get to escape the court and go to somewhere better, um, where gender is fluid. And I just think it's great, yeah. Anyway, I interrupted. You were going to talk about more of your shows.

Ali: No, that's okay. And Cliff is an amazing cultural provocateur. Uh, and this, uh, this approach to, I think talking about, uh, Shakespeare and also what you choose to come see in the theater, um, is a jumping point for him to also talk about, uh, race relations and colonial, um, uh, uh, colonial histories of Canada and Australia. Uh, and, uh, you know, just, kind of, our shared histories of, uh, settler cultures between our two, uh, continents. So, that's gonna be really interesting.

Um, what else can I tell you? Over at Barangaroo we have, uh, our event vigil, which has been a beloved part of the Sydney Festival program for many years now. And what we're doing is, we're taking something that used to be a gathering just on the evening of the 25th of January for all folks to observe that sunset before January 26th, and we're expanding that out to a three-week program. On the lawns of Barangaroo, where folks can come and sit under this beautiful structure that we have built, uh, and engage in different workshops, panel conversations, sunset performances. And that'll culminate in, again, that January 25th final moment called Vigil Truths this year.

Anthea: Hmm.

Ali: We have such a huge range of music. There is such a huge range of theater. It's all really exciting and I think the best thing to do is to direct everyone to the Sydney Festival website to check it out in full.

Anthea: And we will put all of that in the notes as well, that website.

Ali: (Laughs) yeah.

Anthea: Um, I think I was at the first vigil, uh, during Wesley's tenure as artistic director.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Anthea: Um, and it was a really special night but I remember him being so honest about how it was the first time that he was presenting it. He was so open about the exploration of what was gonna happen, so I was really moved that- that evening. Um, so I'm just so excited that that's expanded into such a big program.

Ali: Yeah, and I really value that leadership and that, um, provocation that Wesley gave to us in that first year of, what does it mean to come together and to think about our shared history? And how do we hold space for each other around this particular public holiday? And what it means for multiple communities but specifically the Black fellow community of Sydney. Uh, and I'm really proud of how we've taken that, uh, that idea of gathering and put that at the center of how we have created Vigil this year. This is our spot to sit and gather and talk.

Anthea: Yeah. That's fantastic. I'm really excited by the notion of gathering within the Blak Out program. Um, and I think it's amazing the way that it's developed, that it's not just about coming to see work, it's actually also about participating and conversation. Um, and it strikes me as it's a much broader approach to access than we often see from festivals. Can you have a little bit of a chat to me about that and how... what your approach is in that way?

Ali: Absolutely. I think there's a really strong foundation just within how the festival has approached the access over many years, that we get to work from here. The Sydney Festival, uh, has, as a, as a rule, uh, every event in the festival has to have some level of access. Has to be in a venue that is physically accessible, and then we also have to think about how we make our projects accessible for a multitude of folks, whether that is through audio-description, tactile toolers, uh, low-sensory hours of our exhibitions.

And so that loans itself incredibly well to how we always think about access for community across Black fellow shows and Black fellow producing. First and foremost, as a Black fellow producer, as a First Nations person, I, um, try to think about what are we programming and whether or not my elders, my aunties, my dad can be present for it. I'm getting really emotional about that.

Anthea: Yeah, I can see why but I also-

Ali: Yeah.

Anthea: ... think that the Indigenous community in Australia is so much better at access, and I think that's because of that connection to community.

Ali: True, yeah. Um, this is a moment here where I go, "Oh, my neurodiversity means that when I feel things I feel things big."

Anthea: Yeah.

Ali: Ugh.

Anthea: Yeah. Tell me more about that.

Ali: Um, and so- so, I'll just have a moment here. I... Oh, I have big feelings. Big. That is, that is what that is, but yeah.

Anthea: Yeah.

Ali: But- but what I was trying to say is, um, when I mentioned my dad, my dad has recently become a wheelchair user. And so, in thinking about how we construct the- the sh-... what we're calling the [foreign language 00:13:48] at Barangaroo as part of Vigil, I really appreciate that, uh, working with the production team at Sydney Festival, working with my fellow producers, I've been able to say, "My dad needs to be able to wheel up to it and hear what's going on." And that has been factored into these... the design of that space from the very start.

Uh, what... the other thing that I'm also really proud about with the Blak Out space and something that I was talking about with our access coordinator and associate producer, Maybelline San Juan, only this morning, is that our final music production in the, uh, in the ACO On The Pier is by, uh, Murrawarri rapper, Dobby. Performing his album, WARRANGARU; River Story, that just won an ARIA, uh, for Best World Music Album. Uh, and as far as we know, this is the first time that a First Nations hip-hop performance is going to be performed with Auslan alongside it in the Sydney Festival.

Anthea: That's awesome.

Ali: Um, and if anyone (laughs) if anyone knows Dobby's, uh, music, if anyone knows his patter, that voice bit's fast. And so I am, um, so excited to work with those Auslan interpreters. I am so in awe of them. I think it's going to be a phenomenal performance, uh, from everyone on that stage that evening.

Anthea: Yeah. That sounds amazing. I, um, have seen a little bit of imagery of Aus- not Auslan interpretation but sign interpretation of, um, at the Glastonbury Festival. And so of course it's in British sign and it is radical and so much fun, so I just think it's fantastic that you're bringing that to the festival as well. That's really cool.

Ali: Thank you very much.

Anthea: And also, I know that with, um, the Sydney Festival, you've got Back to Back Theater coming in as well.

Ali: Yes, we do. Performing their amazing work, Multiple Bad Things.

Anthea: I haven't seen that yet.

Ali: That will be in our second week of the festival. I haven't seen it either. I'm really looking forward to it. I came straight from a production meeting from that, uh, to this conversation with you, so I'm seeing again how everything's coming together and all of the nuts and bolts of it are there. I'd be remiss if I didn't say that there's going to be a tactile tour of that set on Thursday, the 9th January from 6:00 PM, as well as an audio-described performance that evening as well.

Anthea: It's a pretty, um, amazing set as well. It's, um, it's this amazing, kind of, sculptural shape that moves around, so I think it will be a really great one to do a tactile tour of. 'Cause sometimes the thing with tactile tours is it's, like, "Oh, it's just a couch on stage and a set of chairs." But in this case it's actually something really amazing to have a- a tactile experience of. So I think that'll be really cool.

Ali: Yes, indeed. And I won't give away how it's been constructed but now I know.

Anthea: Oh. I don't know. So, uh, that's cool. That's really cool.

Ali: (Laughs).

Anthea: I know that you're about to move to Create New South Wales where you're going to be looking at First Nations strategy and producing. Can you tell me a little bit about that move and what you're hoping to do while you're with a major funding body in the state?

Ali: Sure. This is a bit of a full circle moment for me. When I first moved to Sydney, uh, 2009, 2010 I was the administration officer to this role that I'm about to start at Create New South Wales (laughs). And what I'm really excited about and, you know, won't get to sink my teeth into until after Sydney Festival, so February 2025, um, is to look at how the Creative Communities, uh, s- strategy that was released by Create New South Wales at the end of 2023, um, to look at what are the First Nations first elements of that? And what we can translate into a First Nations engagement strategy, um, that gets all of our multiple different, individual artists, organizations, language groups, community groups, lands councils etc. engaged in the arts, engaged in Create New South Wales's, uh, funding programs.

And to look at what the gaps are and what we could be doing from an arts funding and policy, uh, perspective to better support and engage with Black fellow arts, particularly in New South Wales. Particularly New South Wales Koori-Goori-Murdi cultural expression.

Anthea: That's so exciting.

Ali: And I should just put a caveat there as a little explainer. For those who don't know, when I say Koori, Goori or Murdi, I'm using, uh, some general language to refer to Aboriginal folks of, uh, New South Wales but it's not confined just by state borders. We're also, when we say Koori, sometimes we're referring to Victoria, when we say Goori, uh, folks may recognize that as more Northern New South Wales. Murdi, of course, is, uh, looking at just below Queenslanders, so not quite Murray but not quite Koori.

Anthea: Yeah. Yeah, great. Thank you for that. Hey, that's so exciting that that is a role that you used to be- be the administrator of and now you're the lead in that role. Congratulations!

Ali: Oh, thank you so much. I'm still expecting that I'll walk in and take everyone's coffee orders, though. Uh, I'll just fall back into old habits, and I think that's not a bad habit to fall into either.

Anthea: Yeah, I think everyone should make coffees and make cups of tea. Everyone should be responsible for care, in my opinion.

Ali: Absolutely!

Anthea: Yeah. But speaking of that, I'd love to hear the advice that you have for other young creators, uh, particularly people who are neurodivergent. Particularly young Indigenous people, about how to build their career in the arts, because producing in the arts is a really unique and specific thing. How do you encourage people to develop their careers?

Ali: I think that it's really worthwhile, uh, taking time to think about what your level of professionalism is, what your capacity is and where you can work within your strengths and in capacity. And to figure out what... where you can cut through some bullshit and make things easier for yourself, as well. So, I'm speaking specifically as an arts administrator and producer.

As somebody who is, uh, always chasing artists for invoices, bios, headshots, the administration side of our creative practice, where can you make that easier for you from the start? And some of that is actually sitting down and writing a bio if you have not done that already, um, and having a very easily accessible place where that can be downloaded from or shared from, alongside your headshot and any other information that you need to have on-hand as a creative. To make it as easy as possible to work with other creatives, organizations, institutions, agents, etc., etc. For example, we were talking before we started this interview about my website as a freelancer.

Anthea: Mm-hmm.

Ali: My website is my bio and my headshot and an audi- and a, uh, sorry, a visual description of my headshot. All in one place that I keep up-to-date, that I don't need to go find and send each time I do a thing. Whenever I'm working with someone that information is there and there's a, um, an invitation on my website to say, "Please use this."

Anthea: Yeah.

Ali: You don't have to chase me for it.

Anthea: It's- it's... Yeah.

Ali: And that's me managing my own ADHD there.

Anthea: Yeah.

Ali: From the very start.

Anthea: Yeah, and as soon as I said to you, "Hey, can I use that headshot?" You laughed and said, "Yes, you can." (Laughs). And yeah.

Ali: Yes.

Anthea: Yeah, saving your time for the creative stuff is really important.

Ali: That's it. And you know if you think about it as, uh, you... where your executive function is being used up, um, a lot of times when I work with artists, that is the, that is the thing that they struggle with and they talk about the most is that, um, the administration side of stuff just takes so much time, so much energy, so much space. So where can you create a system or a process for yourself that makes it easier to give yourself that capacity and that executive function to be able to make the bigger creative decisions?

Anthea: Yeah.

Ali: And not worry about your administration.

Anthea: Hey, that is such a great provocation to start us off with a new series. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Ali: Oh, thank you for having me.

Anthea: Welcome back to Sideshow on 2RPH. Unfortunately, Hanna Cormack had to leave us at the end of Season 2, so this season I'm gonna be doing that What's On with Liz Cooper. Liz Cooper is an amazing arts practitioner and actually a very dear friend of mine. Liz, it will be fantastic if you introduced yourself, told us about your arts practice and your experience of disability.

Liz: Well, firstly I wanna say thank you so much for having me on. I'm very excited to be doing this with you. And, um, I've loved the first two seasons, so I've been a lis- longtime listener. So I'm really excited to be part of this. I'm a filmmaker, I'm a writer-director. My creative practice is all about exploring stories and experiences of people who are often overlooked. Specifically, I look at Black, looking at marginalized women. Often I notice I explore a lot about class, more than any other thing. I really, really (laughing), like, talk about class a lot in my work. Um, and I think that's because it's something that's affected me quite a lot.

Since I was a kid I've always loved telling these, like, little intimate stories that are about small moments in people's lives that have big effects on their lives. I have a lot of reoccurring themes in my work and I really am interested in the intersection of identity and the impact of social issues on the body. I suppose my- my practice has always been driven by this idea of putting unseen women on screen, and, yeah, so I've been working towards creating a body of work that honors that vision of-

Anthea: Great.

Liz: ... you know, seeing, uh, seeing who we don't, who we haven't seen. Of people I never saw and I'm sure people you never saw.

Anthea: Great.

Liz: Um, yeah.

Anthea: And how do you think, and how do you think your experience of disability has forged your career?

Liz: I mean, it's- it's so woven in it's sometimes even hard to have a clear understanding of all the different ways but, um, from a writing perspective, I know that I'm really interested in pushing back against narratives that, um... you know, there's a lot of narratives of transformation, about self-improvement and overcoming adversity? And I think for me, those narratives have often just confirmed social hierarchies and so it's in my writing specifically.

Anthea: Thanks for that, Liz. That's a beautiful, um, summation of your work and where it comes from. So, what are you seeing and not seeing this month?

Liz: There's always so much on and so many interesting things going on, but what I am not seeing this month that I really, really wish I was seeing, is the art exhibition, Intimate Imaginaries. It is the first major museum exhibition dedicated to the work of Art Project Australia artists. It's in Healesville, Victoria at the TarraWarra Museum of Art. Um, I don't know if you know much about the Arts Project Australia artists but they've been going for about 50 years. It's an incredible social... creative social enterprise that supports artists with intellectual disabilities to develop their artistic practices and... as professional artists. Like, they do paintings, ceramics, digital art, zanes. Like, the art is incredible. It's incredible contemporary art. Like, it's very, very, very diverse and interesting artwork.

So it's pretty exciting that they're having their first major museum exhibition. It's open now until the 10th of March and it's in the TarraWarra Museum of Art in Healesville, Victoria, but if you want to see other work from the Arts Project Australia group, they have their studio in Northcote and a, um, gallery in Northcote, Melbourne.

Anthea: Fantastic. And what is it that you are seeing this month?

Liz: What I get to see this month, which I'm very excited about, is Multiple Bad Things, the Back to Back Theater show at the Sydney Festival. Um, it's on from the 8th to the 12th of January, so it's only got a very short run. I'm really excited about this show. It's... I've always... I love Back to Back Theater's work. I mean, I think a lot of us have probably seen a lot of the great work that they've done. Like, it's just so interesting, so contemporary.

Um, and there's some new people in the room devising the work for this particular Multiple Bad Things show, so I'm really interested in seeing what they've brought in and how they've woven it in. You can find out more information on the website.

Anthea: I will absolutely link to the website as well. We had a little brief chat about that earlier in this episode. I am really excited about this show. I also should acknowledge that I have a total conflict of interest here because I'm on the Back to Back board, but I am on the Back to Back board because I am a diehard fan of this company. I think they are one of the most exciting theater companies in the world. And yes, as you said, it's actually been associate artists Ingrid and Tamara who have directed this show. Uh, for the last couple of years most of the work done by the ensemble has been directed by Bruce.

Um, and if people wanna go back and hear a little bit more about, uh, Back to Back Theater in the very first season of this show, uh, both Ingrid and Simon came and had a chat to us about the work of Back to Back. And that was well before I was on the board, when I was purely a fan girl, which I have continued to be over the years. But, yeah, I will be there on the 8th and I'm really, really, really looking forward to it. Hey, thanks so much for joining us, Liz.

Liz: You're absolutely welcome. I've had a great time and I look forward to seeing you next month.

Anthea: So, to take us out I have one of my new favorite tracks, Speak by Naarm-based artist, Magnets. I've added a link to her Bandcamp on the show notes. Go and have a listen, I highly, highly recommend her. And if there's any particular artist or project you want us to have a look at, do get in touch with me, we'd love to hear your thoughts.

Music: Starting to feel it all inside of me.

Easy to do when the world's on fire.