

INTRO

(The following is read by Laura Colby over jazz music composed by Manual Cinema)

Hi, I'm Laura Colby and this is The Middle Woman, a roadmap to managing the performing arts. I'll be sharing personal anecdotes from my 30 years in the field, exploring the nitty gritty and the technicalities of this job. I'll tell you the story of how I got here and what it's taken for me to work in the industry of the performing arts.

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EPISODE 26

LAURA COLBY: Hello, this is Laura Colby. I'm the founder and president of Elsie Management. And we are talking today about power once again. And this time I'm thrilled to have Rob Bailis from Broad Stage in Santa Monica, California with me today. And I'm going to allow Rob to introduce himself and all his titles. And also tell us how did you end up in your job today?

ROB BAILIS: Oh, it's good to be with you, Laura. I'm currently the Artistic and Executive Director of Broad Stage in Santa Monica. I got to that job by a somewhat circuitous route. And I think that most of us who do this work have similarly obscure stories about how it happened, partly because certainly at the time that I was getting into this career, there was no clear pathway to it.

I started off as a classical musician. I started off as a clarinetist and that was my first career and I pursued it ardently. It's the centerpiece of my life and it keeps my soul together. I was determined to go to, to music school and to, and to get into the field. And I followed that path and achieved that.

I think for anyone who studied the classical arts, anyone who's been a classical musician, or, classical dancer, the way those fields operate for a young artist, it's an act of absolute exclusion. It's a singular focus. If there's anything else on your mind, you will be told by anyone who can smell it that you should do something else.

I was teaching at Perry Mansfield in Colorado in the music department and I happened to encounter two people who are still very dear to me this day, Glen Eddy and Fiona Lummis, who were, muses of Jiří Kyliá and during that period of Nederlands Dans Theatre. Being on faculty with them I got my first introduction to contemporary dance. And that was eye opening for me. I had no idea that aesthetic

existed. It felt so akin to me as a musician who was always on the contemporary cutting edge of classical work. I'd never seen it embodied like that. My heart opened. My world opened. And I thought, oh, I need to know more about this.

There was these sort of moments of contact with these transformational artists that, for me, on my journey, really shifted my consciousness as a musician about what I could be considering.

So, I came back from that summer at Perry Mansfield a changed person in terms of what I knew was in the world. Shortly after that, I had landed another teaching job, which was also my first administrative job and that was at the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts in Richmond, California. And in that job, I was teaching classical music, but I was also running a curricular development platform.

I grew in that institution all the way up to being an associate director role there. I had begun to learn about grant writing, I began to learn about how we actually finance these things. I'd begun to learn about nonprofit finance a bit. I'd begun to learn about management in a nonprofit setting, particularly management of a faculty. Everyone's cultural practices within that institution were different, and remarkably, it actually was a great environment. I was there for many years. I learned a lot there, I grew a lot there. And I think, really, that's what set me up.

So, I'm scrolling around for jobs in San Francisco. And I see this listing from ODC saying they're looking for a theater director. And I thought, I theater director, I wait a minute. I know that venue. That's, I've played at that venue. It's a contemporary art space and they do lots of great, cool stuff. It's dance, it's music, it's theater. So many people have been there and I, I've always thought highly of it. So I ended up being a Theatre Director at ODC.

I was there through two capital campaigns. We went from, really, what we lovingly referred to as a one room schoolhouse, to a two venue facility that became the largest dance resource on the west coast for contemporary dance. It was fortunate, again, that I got to be part of an institution that was going through every kind of change you could possibly imagine, and got to be in a senior leadership position while that was taking place, again, with incredible mentors. That was my time with Brenda Way and Lori Laqua who, to this day, have framed probably everything I think and know about how you lead an organization of that dynamic mentality.

I was there for just over eight years. And by that point in time, in terms of what I knew how to do, what I was good at, I was pretty compelling at raising money. I was very good at grant writing. I was terrific at foundation relationships.

What I had was a really strong vision for what all the externally facing elements of an institution were. And that set me up for my next big job. But before I get that job, I spent almost two years as a consultant. And what I did during that time was I went out and I looked at my resume and I looked for everything that wasn't on it. And I thought, all right, how can I get that experience? So I ended up consulting with, I think, 10 or 12 different organizations, largely Bay Area, but some national as well, doing a combination of things I did very, very well. And then I would add on one thing that I was trying to learn about. I had a couple of positions where I was able to be an interim executive director, where the organization was small enough that I was reasonably able to handle that.

My next job was at Cal Performances, which is, the largest university presenting organization in the country at the time. My task there was a combination of very high level administration of high performing type A personalities in very, very, very, skilled jobs. Where their skill level was far greater than mine. Right? I would never be close to the marketing director, the development director, the finance director, any of those folks at that level, right? My job was to be the manager who could manage them and to get them actually all on the same page and moving in the same direction.

I think for so many years, we would talk about the impresario model of the major institutions and these were untouchable gods, and they have implied a hierarchy in the field and a hierarchy in the world. Where you were in the hierarchy of an organization was clearly a reflection on how good a person you were, how good you were at your job. I mean, really not, not a helpful way for anyone to try to operate. And for many of us who are aspiring in the field, of course, there was this idea that you've made it when you've got one of those jobs, or you've really done it when you get to a position of power like that, right? Because it's all. What people have agreed to suggest or support or advance about a single individual and how they apparently are affecting the world. And this is of course completely antithetical to how the field should operate and actually does at many levels operate.

So we, I think, are seeing that shift dramatically and I think that's, that's great. But as I come back to it, typically, when you see those institutions where we're talking about one leader, and it was that person's years at that institution, that person in many cases was one or the other. They were either like that president who was like, whoa, or that artistic director who was whoa, but it was the one name you associated with the organization. And then you think for a second about what is excluded at that level of singularity. I mean, is it, is that a definition of excellence or is that a definition of authoritarianism? And I think there's a real complexity in that in our culture, you know, really tough.

When you're thinking about leadership as it's a way in which you're asking people to connect, to collaborate, and to envision together something that is quite focused and quite singular, but doesn't belong necessarily to a single person in its execution. You're talking about a very different management structure. You're talking about very different artistic outcomes, and you're talking about extremely different experiences for the communities that are going to engage with that.

I think what we're finding now in the field, as I've moved on to my next job, where I'm blending all of this together, is at a particularly complex cultural moment when things are really fractured. I think what we're seeing is that there's a real ripping away from, from how things have been and those who really need it to stay that way in order to feel like they're enjoying themselves at all. And the pathways that are opening up, which are so dramatically different, and that is calling for a different kind of leader, it's calling for a different kind of experience, it's calling for very different approaches. And I think what I've noticed about the people who I think are who I admire who are doing this really well and I think so highly of is that they have a very different relationship with power.

One of the things that's interesting about it is that I know for me personally, one of the ways we experience power in leadership jobs is not that we're necessarily executing it, although that is part of it. I think that, the thing that I feel like I've learned the most in this particular job as Artistic and Executive Director of Broad Stage in Santa Monica, is the skill building piece of it or the learning piece of it. I think artistic direction, when you're talking about it at an executive level, is just no longer about programming. It's absolutely not about programming. It's not about making a choice, picking an artist. It's not about those elements of power.

So much of the time with Artistic Direction we talk about the quote unquote power of it as the ability to make a decision, to raise up a voice, to leverage resources, to give an opportunity, you know, all that. And all of that is somewhat true. But if you again go outside of that and ask, well, what is the framework operating on the individual who is making those choices? That framework is is often outside of that person's control completely, right?

So, where is the power, actually? Where is it? It may or may not be in the person who you think is going to get to make a decision. I think we have to also look at it from the other side, which is the person who has made something that is magnificent, desirable, necessary, urgent, is right there for the world. That's actually the power and the person who's making a decision about how that's going to be put into a framework is, going about that all wrong if they're thinking that they are actually inhabiting that power, right.

This is about a conversation with a necessary item that exists in the world because of a unique and particular talent. This exists because of something unimaginable to 99.9 percent of the universe. That kind of vision is right there for you. And that's where the vision has to be singular.

You know, the idea that artistic directors talk about their artistic vision as a list of artists has always made me flinch. Every, every job that I ever was asked to apply for, or I had the privilege of applying for, frankly, where I was going to be in some kind of artistic decision making they would inevitably come down to, what's your vision? And I would always answer it with what I think is a cultural framework for art. And they said, *yeah, but who are you going to program? You know, we want to know what we're getting.* And I would sort of, you know, I just, I never answered the question, never answered it.

So the places that I landed, that I was able to work, was not about *I can pick*. Anyone can pick. It's not about that. If that's the mentality, we are screwed. Like, this is part of why the field is falling apart. There's just a lot of people thinking they can program their way out of the problems they're having with their organizations right now, and there is no doing that. There is no doing that. The cultural framework, the context, the whole thing has to shift. And that's got to come from institutions doing it.

I think the best programmers are focused on a certain kind of artistic integrity, or those of us who are just, boy, can just run an organization like it's a finely tuned machine, those two things lead in very different directions in the end. And when you're talking about the organizations that are still structured, the way many presenting organizations are structured, which is that the top job is both. You know, we're beginning to see that if that's going to be the case, the wisdom of that is that the power is in the collective agreement and the intense commitment to the vision and that the vision is essentially the power and that how you go into a visioning process is not a singular thing. It just isn't. And this is, I think a major shift that's happened in the field.

LAURA: So you have this new job you did it. You got the CEO position. You have all the power now on paper, at least. So when you had, that moment that you described of, getting into the position and when you realized what the job really was going to be for you in Santa Monica, what tangible steps did you take to make that shift?

ROB: Right

LAURA: And also, a year ago you came to me basically with a, a tristis. Is that the right word? It was your,

ROB: A manifesto.

LAURA: It was your manifesto. It was absolutely your manifesto and you ran it by me and you were like, what do you think?

ROB: Yep.

LAURA: And I said, I'm in. And you said, and you said, okay, well I'm working on this because this is what I'm taking to the the gatekeepers at the foundations.

ROB: Right.

LAURA: And it is a foundational shift. It is an institutional shift.

ROB: Right.

LAURA: So I'd love for our listeners to hear a little bit of how you are putting your new power to work and what actual structural changes you are doing and what that translates into distribution of labor across your staff.

ROB: Right

LAURA: And how that curatorial process does work. Because for the artists who are listening to this, like, well, okay Rob, what does that mean? If you're not programming me anymore, if you're not picking me, then who the hell is? And how does that work?

ROB: How does it work? So, well, our director of programming is going to pick you now. Get to know him. He's wonderful. No, let's, let's go back to the top of that. So the first thing, so you said you've, you've arrived in the job. You have the power now, blah, blah, blah. The first thing you realize, I think, for me anyway, is that, yeah you have a lot of discretion. You have the ability to make, but you know, everybody's always, no matter where you are, everybody's still got a boss and whether that boss is the context in which you're working of whether it's a university or whether it's a board of directors or whether it is the pressure on that board of directors put on them by their social context. And, or, on and on, right?

So, it's, you're always in concentric circles of influence. Only, I think, the most profoundly narcissistic or authoritarian people in the world can actually believe

themselves when they say they have power, right? So, there is always something that is influencing it. Always, whether you're conscious of it or not. And I think perhaps the most powerful way to begin to understand that is to do some deep work, which I've done with all the organizations where I've had the opportunity to lead on unconscious bias, because I do think it's the underpinning of improving everything about the way we address this kind of issue.

We decided that we were going to go into a very clear pathway for what we were considering, whether it was operational, programmatic, educational, you name it. And that we were going to build out the platforms around what we were going to actually program simultaneously and together. So when we were considering something, it wasn't just considered by the programming team, it was considered by development, it was considered by marketing, and it was considered by education, which we've shifted in title and in purpose to "activations." And we thought about all the ways that we might work with a particular piece of art because ultimately that artwork is going to carry the responsibility of being itself. And we carry the responsibility of being sure that it's clear. And that it's received. And that it's appropriately handled.

The idea of appropriately handling a performance when it comes was, in terms of how every unit would need to hold it with the same language, the same care, like you couldn't make independent decisions if we're all one team. Those kinds of things, that was a big shift. A really big shift.

We rebranded the Broad Stage organization. It looks completely different. It feels completely different. And we were able to take the time to hire the people we really needed. And the two cornerstones of that were transparency and decision making and when people were led into a process and the sense that as we work together collectively, we're not going to look at a programming team as independent and making its own informed decisions, but as needing to include production, marketing, development, so that the programming team that meets. We have two programming meetings a week. The programming team that meets as the full team is anyone who's holding the artwork. It's not the person who's gonna say, *I like this one*. So the way we get to the *I like this one* part is we start off with what we feel is a cultural context for the season and kind of come to that as clearly as we can internally.

LAURA: That cultural context you're referencing would in the past have been referred to as your artistic vision, but now it's the process of the collective across the staff and the mission-driven framing of this cultural context, which is then driving the selection process.

ROB: The Broad Stage needed framing documents, kind of like its constitution. And we wanted to create an artistic intent for the organization that anyone could read and know, *Oh, I fit into this or I don't*. And we wanted to create a community context, which for us was, *this is how we understand where we are located*. Arts organizations of all kinds grow in the soil where they're planted. So you can't ignore that. And the cultural and community context of the organization, as we see it with something that we felt we had to publish, say, *this is how we view our world*, where we are. There are many Santa Monica's. Not one, and this is how we're talking to it. There are many Los Angeleses, not one. And this is how we're trying to speak to that.

We hired a consultant and went through the whole process and said, all right, we're gonna walk outta this knowing. What are the top five defining elements of how we make an artistic decision? And what's the context in which we're making that decision? And we're going to let that be the beginning of our framework.

And then each season, we're going to say, well, what are we really trying to say or focus on in a way that we feel is going to be, uplifting, impactful, joyful, you know, all the things that we're hoping for. Transformational, of course. Challenging, of course. So that led us to this multi layered platform where when I say, okay, we're going to make a cultural frame for the season, that framework is already held together by glue and nails. And the glue and nails are the artistic intent statements and the community context statements, which were developed in the same process, but they were really separated out. We don't let one bleed into the other because one is really about how would you explain to an artist, the goggles you're looking through and whether or not you're willing to take those goggles off, right?

I'm not suggesting that organizations can actually operate without some indication of hierarchy. I really don't believe that that's true. It's how we handle it, and it's how we actually articulate it. And what we exclude when we behave in that way that I think is actually really deadly.

The absence of vulnerability. Vulnerability is the cornerstone of trust. How do you even know what trust is? If you can't feel vulnerable. Right? If you can't feel that you're, you're out on a limb, but you know why you can be out on a limb, right? it's sort of the negative space there. They just live with each other, those things. We all sort of imagine trust is always going to make us feel safe, and I think it's quite the opposite.

You know, trust is actually going to get us to the places that are scary. It's going to get us to the places that we're vulnerable. So somehow, we've got to have that feeling that we're standing on something that's going to hold our feet while we put

our weight on it. And that, that to me is where those pieces of collectivity, those pieces of knowing you can be in that room and be yourself, and bring yourself fully to it. That's where you really feel that.

LAURA: I want to talk about your new jazz series. Is it a season, a festival or a series?

ROB: It's going to be all three. It's a progress.

LAURA: There you go. And the decision to bring in an outside curator for that.

ROB: One big shift that we made after building the artistic intent, was deciding how we're going to organize that into a curation. The toolkit is really straightforward.

Figure out your artistic intent, know the goggles you're looking through (as in knowing where the unconscious bias is), know the soil that you're planted in, and deeply understand your community context. Those, if those four things are in place, then you're ready, I think, to start saying, Okay, now that we have these frameworks and this lens constructed, that is clearly how we're going to apply ourselves to selection, how, how would we then start to make our moves?

And knowing that when we do make them, yeah, the scouts for the organization are largely going to be on the programming team, but they're going to be coming back with a number of ways to frame a conversation that could go a number of different ways artistically and that we as a group are going to talk about what the potential leverage is and what the ways that we could work with these materials might be for all of the strategic needs of the institution, which will include audience building, it will include new people, it will include new dollars, it'll include all of those things. So it's a comprehensive view.

LAURA: There's so much thoughtful curation, selection access through all of this in that engagement of these artists. Mm-hmm. for your audience. It's a great distribution as opposed to the pick it, show it, go.

Well, the gatekeepers. A term that we hear all the time in our field as we talk about the gatekeepers and the gatekeepers can certainly be the programmers as we have known them as the artistic directors, but also the funders.

There's been a recent change in a lot of what had been institutional support from our larger funders, not the government. I'm not talking about the government, I'm talking about our private funders to stop supporting the institution and to start supporting artists directly. And some of us have, I certainly spoke about this with

Yanira Castro in the power episode I recorded with her about that selection process and how that feels - unregulated is not the right word. Fair is not the right word. There's nothing fair about this business. But at least prior to this shift, an artist could actually apply for funding if they met the criteria. In this new construct that has been devised, there's no application process. There's no way to get in the door.

So that power, it just, it feels, frankly, really beyond out of touch. And what Yanira and I spoke about was there's no invitation. If there's no invitations, there's no access. And so then it feels, even more brutal that process for the artist of getting that support, which as you know always came through in a blue moon anyway.

Like you pointed to once in a lifetime, you know, you get a capital project like that for an artist for them to get name the grant, that's like once in their career trajectory. The influence, the impact, the harm of those gatekeepers, the funding. It's so complicated and it is such a critical and important part of the puzzle.

My artists have benefited greatly from certain funding when it has come through and so therefore I have benefited from that creation of new work and ultimate touring of that work. But as a programmer I'd love to hear - and now good 30 years in - I'd love to hear your experience with again, functioning in that world. The joys and the pitfalls.

ROB: Yeah. I'm trying to describe the change that's, that's taken place. It is very difficult to do, and I think in part because it's still moving. I think we don't quite know where that ball is going to drop. Certainly, I agree with your assessment and all of the language you just used to express what this feels like.

Boy, the gatekeeping piece around funding is always been the trick and when you think about who was making decisions in terms of program officers and then the panels that they would build and the folks who would then kind of do the first read of an application or it would kind of get people through that first approach. It was a very circular conversation and it was pretty much populated, I would say, by the same, I don't know, maybe 50 or 60 people nationally. And it's a very small pool. Many efforts have been made to change that. Some organizations I think have done very well in the way they approach it.

I was in the room when the National Dance Project panel process realized they had it wrong and they really needed to change it. And they did. I think they actually have created one of the more successful processes anywhere in the country. I applaud them for all the ways that they dismantled many of the pieces of what was clearly a closed loop. There's that there's a good example out there for people to look at.

But I have felt over the last five years, it was started before the pandemic. The pandemic was an accelerant. It's an authorship question, that it seemed like the leadership in almost all of our gatekeeping institutions, and we won't name names, around resources decided that it would just maybe be easier if they just made up their own minds about what they thought was interesting and pursued it. And stopped listening.

There's obviously a need to write some very clear historic wrongs. And I am 100 percent in support of what's needed in those areas, particularly when it comes to questions of reparations or questions of representation. These are areas that need incredible focus and care. I mean, it's critical. You can't turn something around that's so baked in the cake, as are our issues in the United States, particularly around First Nations and particularly around racism.

The, the question I think becomes, and that's still going on in a cultural context that is not exclusive to these two particular needs. And that's a question that we all have to grapple with, you know, every one of us. It's a complicated moment, but I think what, what I think is, is so difficult, isn't so much the representation piece or who's getting what it's, it's that there, there is a lack of understanding about how the field operates, a lack of understanding about what institutions need to carry and what an artist can legitimately carry. And I say that as someone who actually believes the artist is driving the field. And my job is to make sure that I'm supporting the artist. That's my firm belief.

If you were to ask me what I am, ultimately in this career, I am I hope, an entrepreneurial partner to visionary artists. That's what I've been able to do the whole time across every one of these jobs. In one case it was about curation and it was about really being in the studio and really being in the process as a producer and the process as an artistic director, and in other cases, it's been leading institution to build the platforms, to build the organizations that are going to deliver. But it's all been the same purpose, which is lifting up an extraordinary artist for the transformational work that they offer the world. That's the only thing that drives me.

So, coming at it from that perspective, I'm completely comfortable with a shift towards an artistic focus, but I also have to ask the question, right? There are those of us who have been going through years and years and years of untangling our own egos, years and years and years of understanding what it is to stand next to a piece of work and support it, and not feel like picking it, illuminates us. And I have to ask, do the institutions that are moving in that direction now, have the actual skills that someone who has been dealing with that question, the ethical pieces of

it, the moral pieces of it, the deep representational pieces of it, for decades? I'm not sure. That the part where you're saying it's unregulated.

LAURA: Right.

ROB: That's, that's the part where I, I also feel deep concern.

LAURA: Yeah. It's the, you know, it's still the continued use of the word discover. You know, this famous director "discovered" Juk'in dance.

It's like, no, no, no, no, no, sweetheart. That's been going on forever. And I'm glad you happened to experience it somewhere. But I do not want to sit in a theater and read your program copy written from your bias telling me that you discovered a cultural form. It's abhorrent to me.

ROB: Yeah, it's wrong. It's absolutely-

LAURA: I didn't "discover" any of my artists. I happened to be in the right place at the right time and I got to see them performing live. Or, they made sure I saw their work somehow, or someone like you introduced me and said, *Oh my God, Laura, you have to see this*. I really wish we could eliminate that word from our, from our shared vocabulary. There should be no allowance for that from my perspective.

Rewind 30 years. What was it that you didn't know about power in this field that you do know now, even with all the changes and the shifts in the last five years? What would you tell yourself 30 years ago?

ROB: I mean, if I was to be able to turn that clock back and be in that moment, and for me, that moment, you know, 30 years ago, I was in between college and grad school. So I'd already started my career at that point. I knew I was really wanting this career as a musician but I still I had been so programmed to want it a certain way and I was still fighting with that. So I only had one view of success in my mind. I only had one view of what a win looked like. I only had one view of what, well, if I'm there, then I have obtained this rank and I therefore have this power.

I think if there's anything I could say to myself, at this point, I would say, first of all, anyone in that position already has an enormous amount of power. I think that the urgency, especially for younger people, always feel like you are absolutely allowed, not only allowed, you are supposed, you are, you must drill into that thing, which is so true. And tap it. That's, that's power. That will get you where you want to go. That'll get, that will fuel you. It will feed you. It will always tell you what it needs if you listen. And I, I think that's the most important piece. If that's a skill we

get younger in life, get earlier in career, then maybe some of the decisions we feel we have to make along the way, which we all have to, will come from a place that doesn't feel so much like you're under the boot. I know for myself as an artist and for others, you know, who've been through all these kinds of layers of things, yeah, there's a lot of years where you feel that way.

LAURA: Oh yeah, it's a big boot. I think that true focus on your integrity. It's just integrity, right? And to put it in the simplest of terms, your belief in yourself, and that that is not an egotistical thing. It's about having that faith and trust.

So for our listener *who might be pondering this field, thinking*, Oh dear Lord, how does it work? What would be the pearls of wisdom, the words of advice around that perceived power and hierarchy that does exist?

ROB: What would I say to people coming in, it's yours to author, you know, there's nothing that is every time somebody tells you that something can't happen, or you can't do it that way,

LAURA: Or, that's not how we do it.

ROB: or that's not how we do it, you know, these are really good indicators that that's just, get out. There's always another place to be, and if there isn't, then you'll make it. You'll make it yourself.

I think we get very caught up in how we measure, if there's again the pearl of wisdom that industry that we're looking at is in absolute free fall and will probably collapse. So this is a really great time for revolutionary thinking. This is the time to actually just start being the thing you want to be and doing it. This is the moment to have that courage to have that particular you you know, sense of self.

And I really want to echo what you said. A sense of self self direction, courage, self esteem. These are things that most forms of training will rely on beating out of you so that it can be replaced with what can be controlled and organized to support a completely flat organism. Right? *This is what it is, like, oh no, no, everyone's gotta have their leg at the same height. Nope, nope, nope, everyone's gotta look exactly the same in this. Everyone's gotta sound exactly the same in this. Oh, no, we're sharing a vision of this music that is just, that's what it, the whole, all of this* training is about literally removing from you the things you actually need to survive if you're going to actually be in leadership or independent in any way in this field.

And I mean, I am not in any way, shape or form suggesting that, you know, entire dance companies have completely, you know, beautifully aligned people who all are

exactly are, are, are meritless. Of course they are not. And if, and that orchestras that have learned to play together with a burnished sound, fantastic. I am not suggesting that that is, that is not a good outcome. But I am suggesting that for many of us the way the training works is it's designed to level you. It's not designed to lift you up.

So as you're going through these moments and maybe you're thinking like I was. and I was fortunate enough to have mentors who gave me the space to even think that while they held me to the same brutal training that I was just discussing, they did give me license to think of myself differently if that's what I needed to do. And that's probably what, was the trick for me. And, and the beautiful part is it left me with a musical practice that has sustained me through my entire life. That's how I go to my place where I need to contemplate and work things out. I've always felt like that was the place where I can ideate the best.

But yeah, it's, boy, you've really got to be careful with that balance. When you come into the field, you'll find it again. You'll find that the, and that's what I'm hoping to get out of your way as you're coming up, but you'll find it again, that. It's just yet another extension of people saying, no, this is what excellence is. No, this is what success is. No, this is. And those things are so dangerous when they're given the kind of primacy that our field tends to do. And of course the, the worst case scenario, which is what we're living in now is that these kinds of institutions were making themselves more and more and more exclusive to demonstrate the rareness and the, and the uniqueness and the supremacy and the quote unquote excellence of their endeavor. And of course, cut themselves off from large swaths of public interest while they did it.

I think we're at a time of great change and my hope is that some of the illusions will actually burst before our eyes and will give us a sense of, oh, actually that wasn't the icon I thought it was. That was just an illusion. And I can actually live in a place that feels more peaceful within myself as I'm navigating the complexities of the situation. It's never going to not be complex.

LAURA: Rob, it's been so great to share in this conversation with you. Thank you for making the trip all the way to Brooklyn from Santa Monica.

ROB: I loved being here. Thank you

LAURA: And dear listener, you know what I'm gonna say: Go see a show. Go see a live show you you heard the man himself right here talking about pivotal moments of experience with an artist. And in order to have that moment yourself, you need to get yourself out there, damn it, and go see something live.

And drop me a line, let me know about it, because I want to know what happens to you in that experience. You know where to find me. Until next time.

(Fade out with jazz music by Manual Cinema)