

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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EPIISODE 27

LAURA COLBY: Hello. This is Laura Colby, founder and president of Elsie Management. And I'm here today, actually in Singapore with Gaurav Kripalani. He's the artistic director of Singapore Repertory Theatre. And we're going to talk about the impact and the relevance of international cultural exchange today. And when the work that you are doing is transforming the cultural landscape of a country, because, Gaurav that's what you've been doing and are doing here in Singapore, that's no small task.

But before we dig in, please let us know how you ended up here in Singapore, at Singapore Repertory Theatre since 2001 as Artistic Director. How did you get here?

GAURAV KRIPALANI: Thank you, Laura, for having me on your show. This is very exciting. I acted in my first play when I was six. And decided this is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life. And that's all I pursued. So, I did every school production. I went off and did a theatre degree and was convinced that that's what I wanted to do. So I actually grew up in Singapore. And I went to the university in the US, after being in the army.

I came back to Singapore in 1997 and met a guy who just set up a theatre. Just to put it into context, Singapore is only 60 years old. He set this up 30 years ago. This was a really tiny, tiny, you couldn't even call it an industry 30 years ago. So everything that was happening by the people who were in the arts at the time, they were pioneers of an entire industry.

I preface it with that because, you know, if you look at the U S which has this rich tradition, that's gone on forever.

LAURA: And the Brits would laugh right about now.

GAURAV: There you go. Even more. So everything that was happening 30 years ago was really new. So in my head, I was going to go back to the U.S. and try and make it as an actor. But this opportunity came up, and I thought it would be six months and we'll see how it goes. And it's been 30 years,

LAURA: 30 years,

GAURAV: Which happens to all of us, right?

LAURA: That's what happened to me. I mean, I've been at this now 30 years.

What was so interesting to me - Singapore is such a young nation. And the mission at the time of Singapore Repertory Theatre, which we now have permission to call SRT for short, going forward, was to cast and have Asian actors on stage. That's an incredible, simple, very straightforward mission.

And here, now your organization 30 years later is doing that and then some, you are a producing theatre, you are commissioning theater. There's new work being made. You are casting Asian artists left and right. You are commissioning Asian writers. So it's interesting for me to see that incredible, trajectory of this organization in such a young country.

GAURAV: When we started, that was what we thought would be the differentiator, that you could do a Hamlet or a Glass Menagerie or a anything with an all Asian cast. And there were very, almost, maybe only one or two other companies in the world doing that. So that was the differentiator when we started, and it worked wonderfully.

One of the first shows we did was "Into the Woods" with Lea Salonga. Lea had just won the Tony for Miss Saigon. So this was her first project after that, or one of her first gigs off Broadway. And so to come out to this island, which very few people know anything about and didn't have it, it was a gamble on her part. It was a gamble, but it was such a big hit. We brought in the creative team from around the world. So the designers, the director. We brought in some of the best people in the world. We had Lea helming the cast. We had a phenomenal group of Singaporean talent. But that attracted audience, that attracted sponsorship, that really was the launch pad to getting us going.

And then I would say it was about a decade into that journey that we took away the, "it can only be Asians." We just decided, okay, we have now established ourselves in our country. Now we're just going to get the best actors in the world,

period. And that's what we've been trying to do, both bringing shows in, taking shows out, and trying to do international partnerships.

LAURA: I wanted to talk about what our personal experiences of having an international cultural exchange moment. And my first one was when I traveled overseas with choreographer Mark Haim when I was 24 years old and spent six weeks in Rotterdam where Mark had been commissioned to create a new dance on three of his dancers, including himself, and three dancers in an equivalent small modern dance company located in Rotterdam with a friend. And we spent six weeks making this new work and ultimately ended up performing in Luxembourg, of all places, and Rotterdam this evening of mixed repertoire, which included that new work that Mark Haim had made along with standard pieces from his rep and the other company. It was a shared evening. And that was my very first international cultural exchange, which was extraordinary because I was living in the Netherlands, which was definitely foreign to me. Getting to know the Dutch people very well and their ways, which let's just say are quite different than Americans. I ate an inordinate amount of pommes frites on the street with fresh mayonnaise, something I had never had in my life, but damn, that was good food.

I remember walking up six flights, those terrifying stairs in those old Dutch buildings, and performing for international audiences for the first time. I'd never done that before, and that was, that was very different. I'd only performed with choreographers in their hometowns. Now, if that's New York city, okay, it's a big town, but still it's the home, you know, you know, people and to perform on stage, brand new work and pieces I've been doing for several years to an audience I'd never met before. I'd never had that experience before.

What was your first international experience either as an actor or here at SRT?

GAURAV: I think for us the mission when we started was to bring in the best people from around the world to collaborate with Singaporeans, and we made it very clear to everybody that it was not about just learning from the best, which we certainly, or I certainly wanted to do. I think we had a lot to offer as well for exactly what you just described. I think for a lot of people that we brought in, especially from the West, this was their first experience of Asia. And for a tiny little country, I think Singapore has a lot to offer. Especially food. So I think being able to give everybody who we brought in the opportunity to eat amazingly well for, food here is very good and very cheap.

LAURA: I have definitely experienced that in the last five days, thank you.

GAURAV: So you actually get spectacular food and especially when we did shows in February, March. They were thrilled to get out of the cold and come and be in the tropics on the equator, performing in a show. So I think that was really the start of for me, international exchange. And then obviously when we've tried to take shows out and it's primarily been our kids shows. We got to go around and do exactly what you said - but experience different places. And then we've been part of some very big international tours.

LAURA: Yes.

GAURAV: That's been, that's been incredible.

LAURA: Well I founded Elsie in 1995, and I joined ISPA, the International Society of the Performing Arts, in I think 2001. And this is a service organization based in New York City, as I know you know, but for our listeners, that holds an annual congress each January in New York City, as well as a spring congress somewhere else on the planet every year.

And this is how you and I met one another. ISPA has basically nearly guaranteed that I see you once, if not twice a year. And once in a while, you and I run into each other because we're both at a international festival or some other kind of international convening somewhere else on the planet. So it's been a real gift for me.

When I think of international exchange, I'm so grateful, first of all, for all the opportunities I have had to see international work on US stages. And yes, I went to school in New York City and yes, that's where I made my home. So yes, I've had a lot of opportunities to see extraordinary touring companies come in to New York City.

But now I manage a roster of 20 artists, nine of whom are based in the US and 11 are international companies. I have great ambitions for all of them and I want each of them to have the opportunity for international audiences to see their work so that those artists get to share their work with audiences that might not otherwise see them because it's not their hometown audience. I'm a firm believer in the capacity of the arts to serve as a catalyst, to provoke thought, and its ability to create an environment in which an audience member might have a revelation or experience or some kind of catharsis, something shifts or moves in them.

I'm both bringing international companies into the U.S., but I'm also trying my damndest to export U.S. artists out of the 50 states. So for our U.S. based companies, we really, really want to see them on the global stage. Which is a huge

lift, as the U.S. government does not have an export agenda for U.S.-based artists. There's no organized method to get U.S. artists overseas regularly with support, which makes it really tough for U.S. artists to compete on the global stage. Because the majority of their international peers actually do have that kind of very organized support to get them overseas, which is why you don't see a lot of U.S.-based companies on the global stage.

But I want to talk about work that makes it onto the global stage. As you and I both know, there's plenty of work that won't necessarily resonate outside of its home base - for a lot of reasons. I am interested in the work that can transcend borders, that can make those big leaps over the oceans. That's what interests me. So what is it that you think makes a performance, makes a piece of theater, be able to do that?

GAURAV: Story, story, story. If the story is good, it will work. It doesn't matter where. I mean, there is a reason Shakespeare is done centuries later, right? It doesn't matter where it's set, we can put it anywhere. We've all seen a dozen different versions of the Scottish play. The interpretation is important, but at the end of the day, those themes are universal. So, I think as long as it's not so specific to a neighborhood, it will work. And I tell everybody this, it's like, just find me that amazing story and we will make it into a play. And it's interesting that I can count on one hand scripts that have blown me away so much that I think it can be performed anywhere in the world. And sell out. It's that few - thousands of scripts.

LAURA: Right, right, right.

GAURAV: But if I had to choose the shows that I think tick those boxes, it's really five. Which is scary, right? Which then boils down to the craft of writing.

We have no shortage of amazing playwrights. I think Singapore has got some phenomenal writers. But in all honesty, I'm not sure how much of that work would resonate beyond our shores. The same can be said of Asian American writers.

So when we started this company and we were talking about casting Asians in work. My first go to having studied in the U.S. was, let's look at what Asian American writers are doing. And again, phenomenal writers. But, the majority of the work I came across was them writing about their experience being a minority. And, the struggles and challenges and conflicts of being a minority in the U.S.

LAURA: Right.

GAURAV: Asians aren't a minority here, so we couldn't do those shows. So there are a few, you know, you have your David Henry Huangs, who certainly written plays that don't deal with that, and we've done a couple of his shows but beyond that, Che Yu is Singaporean and has made a great career for himself in the U.S. There are certainly amazing people, and I'm not discounting that in the slightest. I'm just saying our challenge is finding something that's universal.

LAURA: So 28 years you've been here at Singapore Repertory Theatre, you've had some incredible international cultural moments. Including, I have a little list: 1998 when David Henry Wang's production of "Golden Child" was presented on Broadway, nominated for three Tonys, not bad. In 2007, Royal Shakespeare Company's production of Shakespeare's "King Lear" and Chekhov's "The Seagull," starring Sir Ian McKellen. was presented here by you right here in Singapore.

2009 to 2011, you brought the Bridge Project to Singapore. This being a co-commission with the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Old Vic of London that toured three productions directed by Sam Mendes. I mean, these are incredible achievements, incredible international exchange achievements. Can you talk about the impact and relevance of these accomplishments? Not only for you, but for audiences here in Singapore. But also of course for SRT because these are, I look at those as landmarks and in the trajectory of this organization.

GAURAV: Thank you. Yes. Let me go back a little bit.

A lot of the projects I've done were about brand building. Nobody knew Singapore Repertory Theatre. Half the people don't know that that 30 years ago didn't know where Singapore was. I mean that fortunately changed a little in three decades, but when we started no one knew us. So, "Golden Child" was a huge gamble for us because it was a lot of money for a startup company.

But we knew that being able to say we were associate producers on a show that was on Broadway - we were probably one of the first Asian companies to have billing on a Broadway show at that time. And then of course getting the nominations helped. That really helped open a lot of doors for us. So a lot of the thought process behind these projects is how is it going to build our brand?

When we started we had a staff of three. And in those days, we'd sit in a bar, we'd drink martinis, and we'd brainstorm what the next show was. It was that simple. And then you would do shows like "Golden Child," and they would come and they'd say it's gonna cost however many hundred thousand dollars, and we'd say, okay, we don't have so many hundred thousand dollars, how do we pull this off?

And we're like, well, we basically just gambled. And we gambled the farm. And the philosophy at the time was "go big or go home." If we're going to crash and burn, then we are going to do it in style. That was really our entire modus operandi. And "Golden Child" was a big hit, and we recouped and survived to do another crazy project. And that's really how we got going.

I will digress a little bit to just say that 30 years on, we cannot do that. Because now we have a staff of 30, and now I feel very responsible for the number of people who depend on a paycheck from us.

LAURA: Yeah, but I don't think that will stop you from dreaming. And seeking these other collaborations across big oceans.

GAURAV: We still do crazy things and there are gambles.

In 2002, Singapore opened Esplanade Theatres on the Bay, which is in essence our national theatre venue. It's got a 2,000 seat theater, 2,000 seat concert hall, and a few smaller performing spaces. Singapore had never had a 2,000 seat theater before. And at that time, there was a lot of concern that it was going to suck up resources from the arts here, and it could be this white elephant because no one had produced on that scale.

They approached us and commissioned us to do the opening musical. And it's another example of, if this failed, there would be no more SRT. We ended up doing this amazing musical called "Forbidden City, Portrait of an Empress." It was a huge hit. We've restaged it three times. It's been seen by a couple of hundred thousand people. It's done very well for us.

Prior to that, between 1997 and 2001, We operated on a complete deficit model. So, we'd use the income from the March production to pay the January bills. We'd use the June production to pay the March bills. And if we had two shows that did badly in a row, then suddenly we had six months of creditors calling us. And I think this part was life changing and life shaping for me.

Every morning, and I'm not exaggerating, every morning, I would come to work. And we had an administrator who came in. She'd listen to the voicemails on the phone the night before. And in those days, we had one of those 3M sticky boards on the wall where she'd put the while you were out post its. And there would be a slew of them every single morning. And then from 10am to 12pm every day I called creditors back and begged for extensions. And I did this for 5 years. And it was character forming. Because I got yelled at, I got abused, I got people crying.

And it was, you know, the big companies were annoyed, but it was the mom and pop shops that we couldn't pay that was heartbreaking. Because, you know, they did us a favor by printing a program at a reduced run, and then we suddenly couldn't pay them. And, you know, just. It was a really tough time. But we did it because we loved it and we knew we would succeed.

2001 we did "Forbidden City" in this 2000 seater. And we went from operating with a half a million dollar deficit to having a half a million dollar profit.

LAURA: All of a sudden you had a bank account.

GAURAV: So Charlotte Nors is our managing director and I after that, decided that we will never ever be in that position again. And we will pay everybody on time. And people will know that they can rely on us. So we did bank that profit. And it did change our programming a little bit in the sense that it was no longer shows done on the fly. And this partly has to do with funding as well. We started doing three year planning. We knew that we'd have to do the big musical that would generate the revenue that could underwrite the work we were really excited about that could be a big risk and would lose money. and then we started just making sure that every year we put a little away in a rainy-day fund. Which I will come to later because COVID was that rainy-day fund.

LAURA: Yeah, well, you also had SARS.

GAURAV: We had SARS. So, "Forbidden City" happened in the year of SARS.

So we did it for four nights for 2002 for the opening of the Esplanade, knowing that we were going to do it again for a three week run in 2003. And it was the year of SARS. And we were going to do it in September 2003. In March, SARS happened, and we had to make a decision on whether to pull the plug or not. And we gambled, and we said SARS would be over, and people would be desperate to go back to theatre. And that's what happened. And we sold-out, and that's how we made money. But that could have so gone the other way, right? So, still gambling, but calculated.

LAURA: Yeah, but you went into COVID with a bank account.

GAURAV: We went into, we did not lay off anyone. We did not cut salaries. We kept producing work. And that we now no longer have a rainy-day fund because we spent it. Yeah, we all, yeah. But it got us through.

When "Forbidden City" was such a big hit, We had the great and the good fly in to see it. So some of your biggest producers in the world came. We flew, or persuaded them to come to Singapore to see the show. Because everybody said this can hold its own anywhere in the world and you have to tour. Each and every one of them raved. They thought it was brilliant. Not one of them was willing to put money into a company they were not familiar with from a country they were not familiar with.

LAURA: And these, these people were not strangers.

GAURAV: No.

LAURA: These people know you.

GAURAV: Mm hmm. And they're like, yeah, an Asian musical with an unknown title. Singapore really is not known for this.

LAURA: So this was 20 years ago. I'm just curious, What if you did that today? What do you think?

GAURAV: I think it's going to be very different now. I think now is, now is the time.

Before I tell you about that, I'm going to tell you about what we tried to do to fix this perception. Which, getting to your question about international cultural exchange.

The opportunity presented itself to be part of the Bridge Project. And I'm a big believer in serendipity. My Danish managing director, Charlotte, is not. I believe that it was serendipitous that I happened to be in Joe Melillo's office at Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) where he was talking about needing one more partner to come on board for this amazing venture that they were creating that Sam Mendes was going to direct, and it would be a collaboration between the Old Vic and BAM, and would we like to be a co-commissioner? And I was like, yes. And I'm like, isn't that serendipitous that I happened to be there on that day? And Charlotte is like, no, it took 10 years of really hard work to be in that room and to have that meeting. It didn't just happen. So this is why our yin and yang actually has worked so amazingly for two decades.

What did Joe (Melillo) put on the table? Joe put on the table just that. It's going to be a three year project. Sam will direct all three years. At the time, Kevin Spacey was the artistic director of the Old Vic, in the days where you were allowed to say his name, and they dangled the carrot of he would perform in year three, and that we would have him in Singapore. Based on that, we did not know what the titles of

the plays would be, we did not know the rest of the cast but for us, it was, this is brand building. We get into bed with BAM and the Old Vic. And they were going to have six of the biggest international presenting houses each year. And then in the first year, they did "Winter's Tale" and they got Simon Russell Beale to play Leontes. And Simon Russell Beale is to me one of the greatest Shakespeare actors alive. I could not have been more excited that this man had been cast. There's not a single Singaporean who's heard of Simon Russell Beale.

I mean, our tickets were not moving at all. We had just bet the farm on this mega project with 50 people on tour that was coming to town, and our ticket sales were dire. We're like, hmm, this could be the one. Or it could be our last one. But they also had a spectacular cast. I mean, it was Janine Cusack, it was Rebecca Hall, it was a phenomenal cast. They were just not names that were selling tickets here. It did have Ethan Hawke.

I had to call and speak to my friends in the press and see if they could help generate a story. Which had a huge picture of Ethan Hawke arriving in Singapore. And then we sold out. We literally broke even on the first year of The Bridge Project.

The second year was "Tempest" with Stephen DeLayne. Again.

LAURA: No name recognition.

GAURAV: Nobody knew. He went on to do, Stanis Baratheon in "Game of Thrones," but there was no "Game of Thrones" at that time, right? So nobody knew who he was. He did not sell the ticket. We lost so much money on Tempest. And then in year three, we had Kevin Spacey do Richard III.

LAURA: And was there a name recognition for Kevin Spacey? Yes.

GAURAV: Sold out the minute we went online. This was a co-production with the Esplanade. We could not have done it without them. So, the Esplanade really backed us. We did it as a joint partnership. I think we collectively put in five million dollars and we walked away with a hundred thousand dollars. It was, we got out of it well.

But, that was the calling card. After that, when Charlotte and I went and spoke to people about SRT and shows we wanted to tour, for some reason they thought we were super rich because we'd been part of this project. We let them believe what they want.

LAURA: Right.

GAURAV: But, it was no longer knocking on doors to say, and having to spend ten minutes of a meeting explaining who we are. They were like, oh, come meet us.

LAURA: I've talked a lot about this in, in several of the episodes. This is a slow crawl.

GAURAV: Mm hmm.

LAURA: This is a slow crawl and it can be for you as an artist. It can be for you as an organization. It can be for the industry at large. It's a slow crawl. But I think in our lifetimes, we have definitely seen the world changing. And certainly in this post COVID moment, things, I don't know about you, but I'm still feeling around in the dark here. Not quite sure what's real and what's not. You and Singapore Repertory Theatre has had this incredible trajectory and growth, not just from three staff members to 30, but also your presence on the globe because you have participated in these collaborations.

So what's next? What do you imagine could be, not that you have to give away any secrets, but what what do you think might be around the corner for you guys?

GAURAV: We've just completed our 30th anniversary. I think the thing to

LAURA: Congratulations.

GAURAV: Why, thank you. I think there are two big things that are going forward. Now, more than ever, we are certainly going to invest in those international partnerships. I think touring our own content is going to be a priority. And, you know, 30 years ago, even 20 years ago, my dream was to have that original Singaporean play on Broadway.

Interesting how when you get older, That's less important to me.

LAURA: Right. The priorities have changed.

GAURAV: I don't need to be on Broadway. I do want to fly the Singapore flag and have our shows go around the world. Does it have to be Broadway? No. There are many theaters I would like to be at.

LAURA: Yeah.

GAURAV: And I think those are the partnerships we're going to try and develop and have. So what we're doing is we're commissioning playwrights. To create these shows for us. And rather than the big musical on Broadway that was the dream, I'm finding that the shows that are touring and making money for us are our children's shows.

LAURA: Okay!

GAURAV: Cast a four, forty five minutes. We did this trilogy of kids shows: "Three Little Pigs," "Goldilocks and Three Bears," and "Three Bearded Goats Gruff" written by Anthony Drew and George Stiles, who, Stiles and Drew, who did Mary Poppins and Honk! and a whole bunch of other things. So we had these Olivier Award-winning, West End writing duo, writing shows for 2 to 6 year olds.

They wrote these three, 45-minute shows for us. "Three Little Pigs" has been around the world. It's great. So they don't have to be these big blockbusters. So these playwrights that we've commissioned, I would love one of their plays to be what we take around the world next. So that is certainly one direction.

And the other direction is, locally is, we have set up the Center for Creative Learning, which will be our umbrella for all the education work we do. We're 30 years old, and we really want to give back to our community. So we do a lot of work in access, we do a lot of work in education, we do a lot of work with not just speech and drama, but teacher education, and all of that will come under this center. And I think that's going to be a big focus to us of how we can give back.

One of the things we're hoping to capitalize on is where Singapore is located. We're a very, very cosmopolitan city with an audience that travels a lot and sees a lot. We have incredibly well equipped venues. A lot of the major international touring shows do come through Singapore now because we have an audience base.

One of the things that I've been talking to producers about, both in London and in New York, as well as a few other cities, is, why don't you use Singapore as you're out of town, try out. So rather than being in Boston or Seattle, where theoretically an American critic can see it anyway, and with the internet is going to post a review on it anyway. If we pick up the cost of all those flights, hotels, and per diems, just use Singapore as a tryout. The only difference for you would be you're 18 hours away. So come here, do your tryout here before you go to Broadway or the West End. If we are picking up all the costs for that, then think of Singapore as just further out.

But to make that happen, then obviously we're looking for the same thing that everyone's looking for, right? We need that star-driven vehicle that is going to generate the box office that will cover those expenses. But so far, people seem quite keen. I'm hoping someone will bite on that. And there is this wonderful star who's going to say, Oh, yes.

LAURA: I'll go do that.

GAURAV: I can hang out in Singapore for a week. Why not? So that's what we're working on.

LAURA: That's great.

Well, I did a little reading. It turns out that you and I have several things in common. We both wake up and like to go to work. I love that. We both have teams that are motivated by the same thing, answering the question: how can we make a difference?

You said this so eloquently in some of the interviews I read, is we ask this ourselves at Elsie all the time. How can we make a difference for our artists? How can we make a difference for their audiences? And how do we make a difference for our industry?

I'm quoting you here, and I totally agree with you: *as leadership, when you have everyone aligned on the same team, on the same mission, everyone runs in the same direction.* I love that you said that. And I also love that you said *what matters more than skill is passion*, because you and I can teach skill, but you can't teach anybody passion. I just love that we have those things in common.

GAURAV: It's true though, right? If you can find those people who have the same adrenaline rush from that curtain call that we have, you can learn everything else. But if you don't have that in the first place, why would you work 20 hours a day in this industry? Which is a whole different topic.

LAURA: That's right.

GAURAV: Post COVID.

LAURA: Oh no. I heard you say that as well on another interview I listened to about, like the tech schedule. And yes, that's, that's definitely happening across the industry.

GAURAV: Across the world, right? Everybody

LAURA: Across the industry.

GAURAV: We have lost so many people who would really rather go and teach yoga and make even more money than slog it for 20 hours a day because.

LAURA: Because that's the way we always have done it. Well, we're not doing that anymore, that way. No, we really aren't. Surely there's a middle ground in there that we can find that's reasonable and doesn't kill people. Yes. So it's really important.

GAURAV: No, and I think it's up to us, right? I mean, I know we are certainly one of the larger arts organizations here, at any rate. It is on us to find that balance between how do we make it sustainable for people, which is always competing against how do we make it financially viable.

LAURA: Yeah, because burnout is real. And back to the passion, that can't be an excuse.

GAURAV: Which it has been.

LAURA: It has been it has been.

GAURAV: and you know for you, it's like: why not? That's how you should be.

LAURA: That's how we were trained and raised and entered the field. But there's definitely a shift. And it's so interesting to me. My staff is all 20 years younger than me. My interns are 40 years younger than me. And so we always have this generational presence in the room. And I'm very conscious of this. And in New York we lost half, if not two thirds of our production and technical team, and that has been the hardest personnel and roles to get filled, refilled, and I get it.

Just because that's the way it's always done doesn't make it right, and we'll get there, but I think it's incredibly important to model that better structure, and we can do it. We'll get there.

GAURAV: Yeah. These are the conversations we have to have. But how do we get in a country as young as ours and an art scene as young as ours to lose a huge swath of those people? It's almost like starting over again.

And that can be demoralizing. And you could do that 30 years ago, but to start from that base again. The good people who are left are worth their weight in gold. And we all want the same people. And for young people looking to make a career in the arts, production managers, stage managers, technical managers are paid very well right now.

LAURA: Yes, yes. We need you, listeners, we need you. This field is only as good as the artists in, in it, and the producers, and the arts workers who are ensuring that the work gets made and also distributed. And in order for it to continue, this is the whole purpose. We need more, we need you.

GAURAV: The counter to that is obviously everyone is struggling to make ends meet post COVID for all the reasons we all know. So on one hand, we have to pay the bills and it is a struggle now because attendance is down post COVID everywhere. So if you have less income, higher inflation, because everything costs more, how do you pay people what they absolutely deserve, but we cannot afford? So the model is broken. I guess we all spend a lot of time now trying to figure out what's the formula.

LAURA: And this is the part where you are in Singapore and I'm in the United States of America and our situations are not equivalent and we have colleagues in France and we have colleagues in Australia and we have colleagues all over the world and this is the part where each of us is inside of our own national, federal, state, province system that does or does not support us. So, somehow we managed to figure it out. Which is also why these moments of international exchange are so I mean, they're incredible, first of all, that they happen at all.

I always say, especially if you're in the United States, if you are seeing an international artist, it took an army of people to make that happen. It's short of a miracle that it happened, and it also took an army of arts workers to get that show. Yeah, because it is not easy crossing borders. There is the practical part, and then there's the work that we've talked about, you know, the work itself, and why and how can it cross the border. But we're here and we're doing it.

GAURAV: Mm hmm.

LAURA: It's happening.

GAURAV: Still love going to work every day.

LAURA: Thank you so much for making this happen here in Singapore. It's been an incredible five days on the ground here for me, and especially sweet to see you in your offices here.

GAURAV: Thank you. I know. Can you imagine? We've known each other for 20 years. Finally have you in Singapore.

LAURA: Thank you for listening. I'm going to encourage you to go out and find an international artist that's being presented in your backyard, because surely there is someone who's come from very far away and is performing at your local performing arts center. Go see them, have an experience, drop me a line, let me know how it went and what your experience was. Until next time!

(Fade out with jazz music by Manual Cinema)