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My name is Stefani Kuo.

My name is Andrew Riedemann.

My name is Mia Haiman.

My name is Chloe Knight.

My name is Doug Robinson, and we are the leadership team for the Yale Summer Cabaret 2021.

The Yale Summer Cabaret 2021 aims to re-imagine. What theater can be by embracing non-traditional space, where anyone can follow their artistic impulses and develop new works, skills and passions.

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Hello, everybody. Welcome to Anything But Theater, the podcast where we get a bunch of theater people together, and we're going to talk about anything that has to do with life that isn't theater, because surprisingly enough, there is a world
outside of our professions. My name is Andrew Riedemann, and I am one of your hosts for today.

Andrew: Just a reminder of the rules. While we are having these conversations, theater might come up. It is possible because it is our lives, but if it does as a sign of acknowledgement, we're going to take a drink of whatever drink we have in front of us, whether it be alcohol or water, and acknowledge the fact that we have problems talking about things that aren't theater. And I'm going to pass it off to Stefani.

Stefani: Hi everyone, and welcome to the show. I'm your other co-host, Stefani. I'm really excited to be here with Jean Kim today. Jean and I met working on a show back in 2018 before the pandemic. So that's wild, but it really does feel like the last thing I did in theater. Jean is a set designer and went to RISD, and then went to the Yale School of Drama.

Stefani: And I remember being on the show, asking Jean about the School of Drama, and then I ended up applying and going. So that felt really wholesome and also helpful to my process as an artist. And I'm really excited to be here with you, Jean. Jean is currently in South Korea, so we're 13 hours apart in terms of recording this podcast, but really excited and awake and alive to do it. Jean is not just a set designer; does a lot of set design, costume design, art, illustration. So really excited to hear about all the things that I didn't get to hear about doing that show in that one capacity. Welcome to the show, Jean. Thanks for taking the time to be with us.

Jean Kim: Oh, thank you for thinking of me for this. I would love to talk about anything about theater. Any opportunity.

Stefani: So, okay. My first question just to ask is just, have you been in Korea this whole pandemic or this whole time?

Jean Kim: No, I came here June 1st. It's been a month and a little over a month, but two weeks of it, I was quarantined even though I was vaccinated. So I feel like I've only been here for a couple of weeks. But yeah, the whole time I was in Brooklyn, New York with my two cats, creating ways to deal with time and everything that was going on outside of our little apartment. But yeah, I was in Brooklyn, New York.

Andrew: What part do you live in, in Brooklyn?
Jean Kim: 03:59 I live in what people like to call it Bushstuy, which is a border of Bushwick and Bed Stuy. But yeah, I live right off of JMZ in a little loft studio apartment.

Andrew: 04:15 Awesome. I lived in Flatbush for a few years when I was working at Brooklyn College. So I love Brooklyn.

Jean Kim: 04:19 Oh, yeah. Me too. I miss it very much.

Stefani: 04:26 Are the cats still in the apartment? Where did the cats go?

Jean Kim: 04:29 Yes, somebody else is living there right now and dealing with my cats. But it's funny, I adopted them during the pandemic. So they're pandemic baby kittens. So they're very social cats, personality wise.

Andrew: 04:48 Yeah. I want some personalities. I want some names and I want to know who's the jerk, who's the cuddly one.

Jean Kim: 04:54 Well my cats have Instagrams and they're very big influencers in the cat world.

Andrew: 04:57 Wait, wait. Yeah, pump that Instagram. Let's hear what the Instagram is for the cats. Our listeners want to know.

Jean Kim: 05:03 They are Louie and Lucy. They're brother and sister. They're tuxedo cats. They were born in March, 2020, sometime around there, we think. And I follow and I like to highlight this person, she is an independent rescuer in Brooklyn. Her Instagram is Heidi Wrangles Cats, and she is a TNR certified rescuer. She goes around Brooklyn everywhere on her side time from her profession, and she kind of Instagrams all kinds of trappings and creates attraction from people and gets people to adopt them or foster them.

Jean Kim: 05:45 And so at one point, I don't know really how, but a couple of years ago I ended up on her Instagram page and I just got hooked watching her trap these cats around Brooklyn. She goes into these crazy alleyways behind buildings, above buildings, under buildings, literally everywhere she gets calls from. And through her, I realized there's many of them like her who kind of offer their time and service that way, who is not really a member of the ASPCA; they just work with them on their own. They work on their own through their Instagram to create donations. And people just kind of, through Instagram, really adopt from them. Sorry, go ahead.
Andrew: 06:33 I want to say, I think this is the beginning of a pitch for a new reality TV show. All the people around New York City as they save cats and give them away to other people, I feel like there's a starter right there.

Jean Kim: 06:44 She's really created, I mean, I'm not sure, I really can't speak for this, but I really feel like she's, through many years of me just entertainingly following her, I really wasn't much of a cat person nor a person who believed in people having pets in the city. But through her, I really started noticing all these Instagram accounts and groups of people in communities that does this.

Jean Kim: 07:10 And at this point, there's a couple of girls who actually became a company together, and they bought a two story house together. They created a little rescuer center, they are independent, and they do the same thing. And it's getting bigger and bigger, I think. And Brooklyn has a lot of kittens on the street kind of issues. Many of them are not getting neutered, and a lot of them who can't be domesticated in terms of personality wise, if they're too feral or something like that, they just have the system where they get neutered or spayed and snip their ears so they are spayed or neutered, and then they just let them out on the streets again.

Jean Kim: 07:54 So they're a very important service to Brooklyn, I think. But I honestly can say I was honestly just following them for entertainment reasons for myself, but got really into it. I myself got TNR certified during the pandemic just because of it, and adopted two of them. And yeah, I struggle, honestly, though, with cats, they are species wise, supposed to be domesticated in some ways, domestically living. So I feel fine about it, but I still have a lot of problems with pets in small-

Andrew: 08:35 I totally feel that, but so I appreciate the confession that you've become a cat person. I feel like that is what we've learned so far. Stephanie, are you a pet person? Are you a cat person? You a dog person?

Stefani: 08:46 Well, I lived with a cat in college because my roommate had an emotional support cat. And I loved that cat, but my reaction to most animals, I think Jean, it's a little bit of your thing, is when I see a dog on the street that's cute, I'm like, look, you're cute. But you're domesticated. That kind of sucks. That's what it feels like to me.

Jean Kim: 09:08 That's what I'm saying.
Stefani: 09:09 Yeah. I just see the dog and I'm like, look. People are like, "Oh my God, I want to pet you." And I'm like, look, you go on your way. I go on my way.

Jean Kim: 09:17 Oh, I see. I see.

Stefani: 09:19 You know what I mean? And I think the cat thing is real because cats like to be inside. But dogs I have a harder time with, because they want to be outside, especially... Well, I had a dog when I was 12, 13, and we lived in a small Hong Kong apartment and we had nowhere to walk her. And it just was really sad. And I think I was like, oh, never again will I have a dog in a city apartment where I cannot walk you in a real park.

Jean Kim: 09:46 That's exactly the same... Yeah, go, go, go.

Andrew: 09:49 Well, I was at a friend's house recently and I saw something I'd never seen before with cats. And that is that the person left the door open and the cats were free to go into the backyard, which they had with a higher fence or whatever. And so they were inside, outside cats, which I've seen, I guess, more in the country, but not in a place like New Haven. And those cats were the most chill cats I'd ever seen because I think they run around and they tire themselves out. And then we were over there and the cat was just laying in the corner, which I'd never seen. Cats usually run away, or they run up to you or something. And this cat was like, whatever. I'm chilling. So if you could find a way to get your cat inside and outside, I think that's the best of both.

Jean Kim: 10:30 I think I also have a harder time with dogs because in Korea, especially recently, I've been seeing this a lot, a lot of dogs don't even walk because there's more strollers right now in the streets that have dogs in it than kids in it right now. And so actually here, the puppies are very collared. It's very Beverly Hills in some ways. Today I was out, today is my mother's birthday and I was taking her out for a shopping day, and I saw three strollers. And I thought it was a baby, but it was puppies in there. And I was like, why are these dogs not walking? In some ways, they're just very overly cared. And I don't even think they're treating them like animals in some ways. And it's very hard to compare to dogs in Central Park running around in some way. Anyway. So I just generally have, like you said, I grew up in a very small apartment and I have a hard time making that make sense.

Andrew: 11:38 I am a strong supporter of what you said about pets are pets and humans are humans, and not getting those two things
confused. Because I do think there's a strong bond I've seen some people have, especially with dogs, where the dog is almost like their sidekick everywhere they go. And it's really special, and they definitely work to get that. But at the end of the day, dogs are not people. Your cat is not a person. And I think that that's always an important thing to remember.

Stefani: 12:08 Yeah. Well that's like people who full on cook meals for their pets. I don't know. I'm like, is there a limit? What's happening with the pets here?

Jean Kim: 12:18 At this point, we've been quarantined in our house for many months recently. So I feel like I kind of felt to on my own to be contained in some ways without my will. With a pet thought, the question of will is very different with animals and us. But still, in some ways I have a specific perspective to that empathetic place.

Doug: 12:49 Bark and vine is quickly becoming one of my favorite spots in New Haven. Located at 49th and Orange Street, they are an indoor plant shop specializing in tropical plants. Whether you're a first time plant parent like myself, or a long time gardener, their shop has everything you need. They believe that a green thumb is learned, not gifted. You can learn how to take care of plants, find out what they love, what they need, so they can thrive in your own space. And they're here to guide you. Their knowledgeable team of plant experts will guide you every step of the way and finding your first, second, third, fourth, fifth, however many plants you desire. So go on in, check out Bark and Vine on 49th and Orange Street.

Andrew: 13:32 Speaking of South Korea, how is it going there? I just read in the news today that cases are actually kind of up, and is it going back into some sort of restrictive nature?

Jean Kim: 13:44 Yeah. Especially in Seoul right now, they've been very comfortably open, but as any country right now, quarantining, any kind of rules also inevitably it gets political when it gets too harsh. And people, when their will's kind of taken away, it does get distorted in terms of the energy of the place. And so I do think, more than they wish to as Korean government, recently have been opened or been scaling back.

Jean Kim: 14:27 Right now, Korea is scaling back to kind of businesses opening until... I mean, but this kind of depends on areas, but Seoul specifically is getting back to kind of opening until 7:00 PM and only parties of three can be met, things like that. Generally, the
biggest problem I think is Korea doesn't have enough vaccines going around. And so a lot of times, right now my parents has gotten one shot, and they also don't have much really, what do you call, household names of vaccines available here. And so people who are getting even two shots of it, they're getting two different kinds on one time in the next. And they're not even sure if that works that way or not.

Andrew: 15:23 I've heard that they're switching up, at least in the states, that brand name, the Johnson and Johnson and the other one, some studies have suggested those actually, because they're different styles of vaccines, getting both of them actually offers more coverage.

Jean Kim: 15:37 That could be true. And so right now currently, I think they're still in the place of 65 and up are allowed to get a vaccine, but they don't really have enough to spread that fast. I think the proportion of vaccine spreading and the proportion of variants spreading is kind of fighting each other on and off. But yeah, it's going up a lot. So honestly, back in the day when New York was peaking crazy, I was like, oh my gosh, I have to go back to Korea. They're open. They're all safe. And now when I got back vaccinated and coming here, I was a little, okay, I don't want to go back. And I really wanted to bring my parents to New York and get vaccinated there, something like that. But it's all going fine. They're very controlled in some ways. Everybody has QR codes everywhere they go that they have to sign into, and things are very efficient, as you can imagine in East Asia.

Andrew: 16:43 That's good. You mentioned the pushback though. And I was wondering, is anti masking a thing there? Is there anti-vaccination campaigns in South Korea?

Jean Kim: 16:56 No. And I try not to generalize, but just the general characteristics of Korean people, they're not too rebellious of masking or things like that kind of rule. Though I do think there are bigger fear in vaccinate vaccines, as we can all imagine, but I think that's not the biggest problem. I think it's just the economic pushback. The businesses closing is really the more, the government can't really control it as harshly as they want to because of very obvious economic issues or rebels that can come and create more bigger of social problems. And so it's really the same issues that we are dealing with in U.S too, in bigger cities. But even then, I think, what I realized in New York and here, it's much more easier for some reason to still push back and push forward, going back and forth, less fight.
Andrew: Yeah. Less animosity.

Jean Kim: Yes. Less. And the concept of individual freedom is very different than U.S. That's very specifically, I think, a U.S idea.

Andrew: Well didn't you know? America is the only free place in the world. We have it. We got it all. We're free. Nobody else is free in the world.

Jean Kim: Yeah. I mean, the idea of collectiveness. I do think this is kind of the biggest difference in characteristics of being a bigger... I really think it's a very generally a big country issue and a small country character difference at times. Of course there's many specific details that goes with it. But I think the collectiveness or the idea of being a collective in front of a crisis is a very different issue in a country like America.

Andrew: I'll say, I lived abroad for four years, so I got this wonderful experience of seeing the world from a more universal perspective than an American perspective. And I think that not to blame the media like it gets blamed sometimes, but in America, everything is so America centric and we don't even recognize it. In America, if you go to the movies, you just say, "I'm going to the movies." And our perception of entertainment is entirely American centric. Whereas if you're in any other country in the world, it'll be, oh, American movies or South Korean movies or French movies.

Andrew: But in America, that concept doesn't really seem to hit us. We just put everything else and we're like, "Yeah, foreign movies." And I think that from a beginning point, we all are just now exposed. Even in the news, our news is so American centric, whereas in foreign countries, they're going to have the news produced by the country of origin, and then they'll also have the BBC, and then they may also have the sky network or whatever that Russian propaganda crap is. And then they'll also have CNN. And it's just a lot more wide variety of to remind yourself that there's a whole world that exists outside of your experience and outside of the America experience. And I think that that's something we miss.

Stefani: Yeah. It's also this idea of Americans who are like, "The pandemic is over." And I'm like, there's a literal rest of the world. The rest of the world who are still lacking in vaccines. And the same thing you were talking about, Jean, about collectivism, and the backlash with a year and a half and everyone's still... Especially in east Asian countries that have
been controlling it pretty well, and are stuck because they're not getting enough vaccines because places like America are getting all the vaccines and people don't even want them. And they're being manufactured in places like India where they need them, and then being shipped to America where no one wants them. And I just feel the frustration has to be through the roof. My parents have also only got gone one dose and are waiting, and are also distrustful of the government. And also they're giving just different doses of everything. And then what are you supposed to do when America is like, "It's over." What is happening?

Andrew: 21:49 And it's not over. Our cases are actually going up right now. I mean, we're very small cases, but they're starting to tick up. And we've been doing this for a year and a half now. These trends are slow and they just continue to go, so my expectation right now is that they're going to continue to go up until November or something. People aren't getting vaccinated. And with the frustration of, I understand businesses are closed and that was frustrating. But I guess I get confused when people don't want to wear masks and also don't want to get vaccinated. And it's, well, how are we going to get through this? I have a lot of problems with my government, but I would say that I feel like the most patriotic thing I've done in the last 10 years was go out and get that freaking vaccine because I want the country to be back to normal, and I don't understand why people... Like I said, I get it. You don't want to wear a vaccine? Then wear a mask. This is where I get confused about that stuff. But I think it goes back to the individual rights of Americans and the fact that they think that freedom means something that I don't think it means.

Jean Kim: 22:49 Yeah. I think it's such a complicated layers of issue with we get into it. But ultimately, with a lot of issues that we deal in America does come from having the privilege to be in some ways the continent that already has such diversity. In some ways, when you have so much land to be collective of and to be one voice of, you almost kind of miss so many questions and you miss any kind of... Think, in New York City when I lived there, the apartment's small, but I think I go outside, I go to a store and I think I can get Cuban food. I get all these different diverse kind of perspectives, I think. But then I ended up being lazy about these detailed questions that I'm not actually doing. But other countries where it's more homogenous here, as you talk about the news being diverse, we almost have to be that way. We're already, in terms of our population, demographic, so much more homogenous of a country, and so small. I mean,
we're size of the state of Indiana in some ways. And in order to grow as a country, we have to kind of open up our scale of our perspective to the world. Whereas in America, I think having that privilege almost made us lazier to be humble in that way. We know too much, quote unquote, or we know enough or something. And so I don't know. Anyway.

Stefani: 24:46 Yeah. That makes total, I've never thought like that. No, no, no, no. What were you going to say, Andrew?

Andrew: 24:53 No, no, no, you go, Stephanie. It's all you.

Stefani: 24:53 I just am processing that idea of, you think diversity is around you, therefore you don't have to go looking for it, which I think is true. And then on another level it's like you have to pick and choose how much your brain can handle on any given day. I recently deactivated a lot of my social media, and it's somehow given me more brain space to look for news elsewhere. But when you have things coming at you all the time from all these outlets, then there's so little brain energy, I feel like, to go looking for more when you're like, I can't even handle the stories I see from my friends. They go on to the BBC and the CNN, and all these other channels that I have to go looking for and like investing in. I don't know.

Jean Kim: 25:46 It's like... Go ahead.

Andrew: 25:49 I was going to say, how much do either of you read news that makes you furious? In order to, I try to find the moments where it's not going to ruin my day, but I will occasionally go out of my way to read The Wall Street Journal, which generally makes me upset most of the time, or to try to understand the opposition or to understand opposing views. But I will say it's a dangerous game to play because it can send you down a spiral. But I do think it's important to be aware of the other concepts that are going on in the world.

Jean Kim: 26:27 I don't know why, it's hitting me as such a complicated question just because news to me these days, I guess, because I'm coming back home in four years, and I'm watching news here about America. And I'm realizing, coming from New York, that how distorted also... Not distorted, but where they're focusing on, even if they're showing different places of the world. Everything is pointed to how they would like Koreans to feel about those issues in the world. And I do think recently the news have had much more power of that. Anyway, let me think about that question a little bit.
Andrew: 27:22 No, no, I think you're totally right. Because the thing I'm thinking of right now that pertains to this, and then I think we've got to wrap up this news conversation because I think it gets a little depressing, but anything that has to do with Israel, if you read in the United States, it's generally pro-Israel news. But I always like to get the alternate perspective by reading Al-Jazeera, which has an anti-Israel news lean to it. Right. And so it's almost like to be an informed individual, you got to go read all those things. And it's hard because there's not one truth. All these things are somewhat true in one way, shape or form, but it's that complication of looking and investigating, and like I said, being willing to read news that makes you mad, but put that into your brain and pack it away because it'll be useful to you later.

Stefani: 28:10 Yeah. I will say in response to that question, Andrew, I was home, Jean, for the year of the pandemic until late January of this year. And I came back to New York, and everything in Hong Kong is bad, for lack of a better word. And all the news is effectively propaganda at this point. So the news to me is not real. I'm just like, I don't trust anything I watch or read because it's ridiculous. And you walk on the street, you see what happened, and you read the news and news is completely distorted. And you're like, okay, there's no reality correlation between the two. And it almost feels like, well, if the news is not reliable, which it never was to begin with, but if it's truly unreliable, then what you have left is looking for the real people. I don't know. I've just been trying to figure out how to figure out what's happening in the world without relying on unreliable news outlets, I guess, because everything is somewhat propaganda-y about other countries, about their stance, about what they want you to think, like you were saying. Yeah. It just feels very just, how are you supposed to know what you're supposed to know? I mean, I guess the solution on some levels, reading everything, like you were saying, Andrew, of different perspectives. And then on the other, I guess experiencing, or meeting people who know, question mark?

Doug: 29:30 Are you a New Haven, Connecticut business, looking for new ways to reach customers? Come and advertise with us, the Anything But Theater podcast, brought to you by the Yale Summer Cabaret 2021.

Andrew: 29:42 Unfortunately, Jean, it looks like your chance to put yourself in the work you're doing, and the theater rule is dead now, so we can talk about theater as much as you want to.
Jean Kim: 29:49 I'm not sure if I want to.

Andrew: 29:51 So I just want to hand the floor over to you to say whatever you want to, to close out our interview session.

Jean Kim: 29:57 Thank you so much, Yale Cabaret Summer Team, to invite me to just get to know you guys. And I really wish we had infinite amount of time to get to know each other. And I hope that we meet each other soon in person and do that over lots more drinks. I am currently a New York based set designer slash costume designer. I work on film, fashion and theater, but I also illustrate and do my own artwork. My Instagram is @jeankimsstudio, and I am a south Korean artist. I'm currently actually working on a musical with a Korean composer where it's kind of using an old Korean opera type music, but I'm just always kind of challenging myself to try new forms. And I really hope to meet new collaborators in the future in any other world out there. And so thank you, Yale Cabaret, for giving me this opportunity to, I guess, talk about myself. And I can't wait for your next episodes and your whole season.

Andrew: 31:13 just want to say, I feel like the challenge is why we all do theater. I think it's the ...

Jean Kim: 31:16 Oh yeah, what else is there?

Andrew: 31:19 ...Finding solutions, right? Because the pay isn't great.

Jean Kim: 31:20 It doesn't pay, it doesn't (laughs). Without the passion, there isn't.

Stefani: 31:28 Yeah. Well, Jean, we will jump out of this, but do you know when you’re heading back state side, or are you planning to stay there for another minute?

Jean Kim: 31:39 Oh, you mean, am I going, am I going back to U.S? Yeah, I'm going back next week. And surprisingly a lot more theaters coming back very fast, more fast than I thought, and so I'm designing multiple shows this fall and this winter. I am also kind of doing some new operas that are getting in film version. And so I'm interested in what that becomes. New forms are coming out of this COVID era. And so I'm always excited for that. All those new forms are going to feel awkward in some ways, I think, but I think change is always good. And so I'm excited even I haven't made it yet. I don't know what I'm going to design yet, but I'm always excited to see what's happening out of the process.
Stefani: 32:27 I'm really excited. Invite us to this stuff. I would love to see some real life things that aren't on Zoom.

Jean Kim: 32:33 I know, I know.