

# Guy Withers

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

opera, people, festival, feel, programme, artists, theatre, ballroom, years, guess, singing, mansfield park, audiences, musicians, productions, happen, singer, organising, create, person

## SPEAKERS

Rebecca Toal, Guy Withers, Hattie Butterworth

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- H** Hattie Butterworth 00:03  
Hello and welcome to Things Musicians Don't Talk About with your hosts Hattie Butterworth
- R** Rebecca Toal 00:08  
and me Rebecca Toal.
- H** Hattie Butterworth 00:10  
Within our vibrant musical world, it can often feel that the struggles and humanity of musicians is lost and restricted.
- R** Rebecca Toal 00:18  
Having both suffered in silence with mental, physical and emotional issues, we're now looking for a way to voice musician stories, discuss them further and to connect with the many others who suffer like we have.
- H** Hattie Butterworth 00:28  
No topic will be out of bounds as we're committed to raising awareness for all varieties of struggle.
- R** Rebecca Toal 00:34  
So join me, Hattie, and guests as we attempt to bring an end to stigma by uncovering the things musicians don't talk about

H

### Hattie Butterworth 00:48

Hello, everyone! Welcome back to another episode of Things Musicians Don't Talk About. Today, it's me, Hattie, just giving a little intro, a little update into us, what we're doing, before we get on to our episode with Guy Withers, who is the CEO of Waterperry Opera Festival. And we just loved talking to Guy, like, wow, you're gonna ... you're gonna love this chat, I just know. But first of all, what's going on with us? Well, we just wanted to say that we are so thrilled to have given our first ever in-person panel discussion last week at the Royal Academy of Music alongside the beautiful Ellie Consta, our friend from Her Ensemble. Thank you so much to everyone who came, who shared, who listened and who was just so honest with us about your stories and journeys, and who asked questions and really made us think about the work we do and how we can make it better and, and the conversations that need to be had. It gave us a lot of hope that there are people asking difficult questions that need to be asked. But yeah, it was also difficult to hear that obviously, things that we've dealt with are still going on, you know, there's still a lot of work to be done within conservatoires and within classical music in general. But of course, the first step to things changing is for organisations and institutions like the Royal Academy to have these conversations. And so we're really grateful that they wanted to open up that discussion, and hope that we can continue some kind of dialogue with them and further afield and maybe do more of these kind of discussions in future because it was just the best like, meeting people in person that have listened to the podcast is just like ... ah I just I felt so emotional. I just wanted to hug everyone like so much and just say like, "Thank you for listening, you've made this such a beautiful space." But anyway, that whole thing of working differently, the whole like, asking questions ... yeah, trying to do things in a new and different and more inclusive way is just something so at the heart of our guest today, Guy Withers. He was such a joy to speak to about his vision for an opera company and how he started the Waterperry Opera Festival a few years ago. I want to say it was like five years ago. I should probably double-check that but yeah, Guy has a background as as a singer which conservatoire and did that life as well, so he kind of has this incredible, like empathy and understanding for musicians and has become especially supportive of those early in their careers, because he obviously is aware of like, the difficulties that you might face. So yeah, he spoke to us about Waterperry Opera Festival, what it's become, the work that they do, the awesome things that are coming up. The festival runs from the 12th to the 20th of August in Oxfordshire and is combining performances of Mansfield Park, Peter and the Wolf, The Marriage of Figaro, and so many more. Like, wow, there's a big, awesome, exciting programme. You only have to go on their website to look at the little like clips of the work they've done in the past to be like, "I want to go, I really want to go and like experience this. It's so different and so cool." So yeah, Guy's vision was that opera should become the creative, inclusive, expressive art form it was founded as, and he's so passionate about this whole project. It feels like it comes straight from his heart and he's so proud not only of what he's made, but of what everyone in the company has done to make it what it ... what it is today. So yeah, it's a really inspiring conversation. Thrilled to have Guy speaking to us and just thank you Guy and to everybody for supporting, listening, talking. And yeah, without further ado, let's get on to our awesome interview with Guy Withers. Well, we are really thrilled today to be joined with Guy Withers who is the artistic director of the Waterperry Opera Festival in Oxfordshire. So welcome Guy. How are you doing?

G

### Guy Withers 05:20

Thank you very much for having me on. I am very well, thank you. It's been a lovely long day.

Thank you very much for having me on. I am very well, thank you. It's been a lovely long day working in the office, getting things ready for the festival so... but it's my, it's a pleasure to come now and speak to you both.

**R** Rebecca Toal 05:32  
Awesome! So where's your office for the festival based?

**G** Guy Withers 05:36  
It's a floating office. And the reason...

**H** Hattie Butterworth 05:38  
Ah, lovely.

**G** Guy Withers 05:38  
The reason for that being that we do stuff obviously at Waterperry Festival, but also this year, for the first time, we're touring. And so I have been... I've had offices all over the country, sometimes on trains as well, just depending on where I am, trying to organise things. So it can be here in London, which is where I live and also I go to Waterperry regularly too, so, but today was London, tomorrow, or Thursday, I'll be at Waterperry, so back and forth, round and round.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 06:04  
Ah, that's really fun.

**R** Rebecca Toal 06:05  
So busy.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 06:06  
So busy!

**R** Rebecca Toal 06:07  
So, Waterperry is celebrating its fifth anniversary this coming year. Is that right?

**G** Guy Withers 06:12

**G** Guy Withers 00:12

It is! Five years! I certainly feel five years older, for sure. But five years - very special. I mean, when we started, we only thought "we'll give this a go, see if it feels right for everybody. Do people want this? Does it feel good?" And now we find ourselves five years later, trying to think about the next five years. What we're doing in year 10 really, so that's very exciting.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 06:37

That's amazing.

**R** Rebecca Toal 06:38

The programme that you've got coming up seems really, really inventive and inspiring - like when I think of an opera festival, I'm like, "urgh, it's just gonna be... same old, same old."

**H** Hattie Butterworth 06:49

Wagner.

**R** Rebecca Toal 06:51

You've got eight productions this year...

**G** Guy Withers 06:54

We do, yeah.

**R** Rebecca Toal 06:54

But is there an overview of the festival that you'd like to just put out there?

**G** Guy Withers 06:59

Yeah, of course, as you rightly say, Waterperry Opera Festival is no ordinary opera festival. And that is in many different ways. I think it's twofold, really, in that the sort of what we put on is very different. Yes, it's opera, but also it depends what you define as opera. I think it just means music drama, really. So gosh, what can that be? Everything from ... we stage song cycles to, obviously a few big grand opera things, but even then we tried to look outside the major canon and do a lot of contemporary work. And we do lots of things for families too, so as an example, this year, we're bringing back our Peter and the Wolf, which is a piece that we have created into a sort of interdisciplinary dance piece so you've got everything from your major opera in a much more sort of established, "okay, here's a big stage, lots of singers, orchestra", all the way down to "let's go and see Peter and the Wolf in a garden with a couple

of dancers." So it's really very varied. And we love to explore how we can make anything really a theatrical experience. So, so that's, I guess, one thing. The second thing, it makes it quite different from every other opera festival is that we like to programme the whole season and like it's an arts festival. And so you can come on a Saturday, and you could see seven different things. Not, not all the productions that we have an offer, but but most of them and all the way from 11am to 10pm there's things on, and so you come for a day, almost like you were more at, I guess, Glastonbury then you would be at Glyndebourne sort of thing. Wow. I mean, I'm already gagging to know ...

**R** Rebecca Toal 08:30  
Hattie!

**H** Hattie Butterworth 08:34  
As that came out of my mouth, I was like "is that appropriate?" No, probably not. I am desperate...probably...

**R** Rebecca Toal 08:40  
It's not getting better Hattie!

**H** Hattie Butterworth 08:45  
I'd love to know more.... No...I'd really love to...

**R** Rebecca Toal 08:50  
I'm going to have to edit this!

**H** Hattie Butterworth 08:52  
Okay, let me start again. You gave such a wonderful overview and now I'm just like, taking it down a few pegs. No, I'd love to know more about the inspiration behind this idea. Can maybe just you give us a bit of a background about, about you? And you know, the vision for the festival, or even the vision that you had for your life?

**G** Guy Withers 09:12  
Oh wow, the vision I had for my life?! Gosh!



**H** Hattie Butterworth 09:16  
We get deep, you know, it's just part of it.

**G** Guy Withers 09:18  
Wow.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 09:19  
I'm sorry, you're just gonna have to deal with it.

**G** Guy Withers 09:20  
I never thought I'd have a vision for my life. I don't think I have a vision for my life other than...

**H** Hattie Butterworth 09:24  
Okay.

**G** Guy Withers 09:24  
... to say that I love exploring ideas. I love exploring new things and I think I never liked sitting still and I think my colleagues at Waterperry will definitely agree that every single year I like to push the boat into even more uncharted waters, sometimes too much but I think that's great because it means people are challenged with their ideas and you really encourage artists and audiences to make a step just outside of their comfort zone into something a bit different. Anyway, going back to your actual question, introduction of me, so I grew up singing. That's really how I came to opera, I was a choir boy and I loved singing. My parents didn't know anything about music at all. And they were very supportive. Thank ... thanks to them for sort of getting me lessons and putting me in the church choir. I also did lots of local theatre too, so I think I fell in love with both music and theatre separately - two very different things. And they didn't come together until I was in my teenage years. I loved singing as a teenager and I always thought it as an extra-curricular thing. I thought I'd get a 'proper job' (inverted commas), and my parents had no idea how to become a professional musician. They worked normal jobs, like my mother was a policewoman, my father worked for Royal Mail so they were like "musician... great! I guess you'll learn an instrument maybe or join a choir?" They had no idea how you pursue it so... but they were very, very supportive, regardless of that. And at 15, I discovered opera. I went to see an opera; my parents took me and I was like, "this is incredible." I just fell in love with it. I ... my idea of what opera was, was completely blown out the water. I thought opera was you know, big stuffy outfits, lots of fat people singing on the stage, and I'd be really bored. In fact, the production of Rigoletto that I saw was set in Manhattan in the 1920s, and there were gangsters with guns, and I was 15 thinking "this is bloody cool. I want to ... I want to do this, I want to see more of this sort of stuff." And I didn't really know how passionate and visceral it could be. And that just sent me on my journey. And so I then went to university and did music, and then as a singer, primarily, I then said, "Well, I want to go and try and pursue a

singing career." So I eventually went to Royal Academy of Music and did a Master's. But all the way through that I had a feeling of wanting to make things happen. And the singing was quite structured. So you joined a choir or you do a solo ... it was very much you take your ... you sort of take your part, and you do that. But I was really interested in "Okay, well, how can we get these things, these ideas to happen?" My friends wanted to do things, whatever. So I started producing at university and founded the Opera Society at Cardiff where I was, and then started to direct and produce shows and make choirs and organised concerts and, and just really got a buzz out of making things happen. And I guess seeing little niches that I didn't see filled, ideas I had, and so, you know, over the last 10 years, I've really nurtured both the singing part of me but also the part of me that really likes to see interesting things happen and to make them happen. And to involve my friends and my colleagues in making that happen and so, Waterperry has sort of been the combination of me, over the last 10 years, producing here and there and then suddenly saying, "this is where I'm landing here, this opera festival, and this is my opportunity to, I guess, make a difference as much as make the work that I've always wanted to make."

R

Rebecca Toal 12:48

I think it's incredible and, you know, obviously quite a ... not a typical path, but like, yeah, for, for a lot of musicians, I think ... I feel a lot of people listening, they might not be surprised that, you know, maybe that's a path that someone that has become, you know, creating an opera festival would have, would have taken but I suppose my question is, were there things in other opera festivals, not naming names, but maybe things that like, you'd always slightly thought ... Not maybe "I don't like this", but "I want to do this a bit differently"?

G

Guy Withers 13:26

Absolutely. I mean, I think there's the obvious things that people can all agree on, which are affordable ticket prices, removing barriers to access to the arts, so if you're going to put something on, how do you make sure that it is at the same time as as enticing and interesting as possible, as well as removing any barriers that people might have to accessing in the first place? And that can be anything from "what language is it in? Is it in the vernacular? Are people going to feel like they can immediately understand it?" to, you know, "are the tickets really expensive? Can I afford to go?" Not to say that going to an opera festival isn't a really special thing, and therefore should have value associated with it because I think that's important to say, as well. But you know, if you're going to buy a ticket for something, whether you're going to an Adele concert, or you're going to go to an opera, you know, I think it's a special occasion, and that's fine. But you also need to make sure that it's within reach of as many people as you possibly can. So that's ... so I think that's said for. I believe in that, I think most people in the sector believe in that. In terms of the unique part of what Waterperry offers, I think I really believe in the intimate, immersive and sort of visceral nature of being really close up to the action in a place that's also really interesting and really evocative so, outdoor spaces, indoor spaces, places that aren't concert halls or theatres, which me, I personally find quite clinical and quite, I guess, rigid. And so when the opportunity to start Waterperry sort of happened, I looked at it as a wonderful opportunity to create stages, to create sets and lots of different... different and interesting outdoor and indoor spaces, and really put the audience as close to the artist as possible. One of our objectives as an organisation (and you can read our website) is about bridging the gap between audiences and artists. And I think that can be done in many

different ways through discussion and through sort of a connection. But ultimately, I love putting audiences right in the middle of what's going on and for them to really be whisked away. And have felt like they've had the most perfect, personal experience they can ever have. So creating productions in woodlands or in in fields, or in ballrooms, or in dining rooms, or whatever, you know, could be in a car park, you never know. But you're not going to get that experience anywhere else, and I think that's what's... really excites me.

R

Rebecca Toal 15:45

Mhmm. I feel like the past few years has been quite ... I was gonna say trendy, I don't mean trendy, I mean, like, there's been a lot more awareness of accessibility and making things a bit more kind of innovative. Maybe that's not just the past few years. Anyway, what I wanted to ask is, what has been your biggest challenge in terms of making it something that bridges gaps?

G

Guy Withers 16:11

That's a really great question and I think it depends who you're talking about, because accessibility in terms of audiences can mean many different things. It can be about physical accessibility - can they access the places we're taking them? As soon as you say, "Oh, we're going to take you into the woodland and really immerse!", you say, "Well, how are you going to get to that woodland?" And if you're in a wheelchair or you have a problem walking, how are you going to get there? And so that's a challenge. So ... and also, we are in a rural space, so you can't just get your bus there. You can actually, but you can't, you know, it's much more difficult than just rocking up out of a tube and walking to Royal Opera House. So there are benefits to being where we are, but also there are challenges there. I also think that how you choose to present the work and the sort of atmosphere you make, that you put around the work is really important. If you make people feel that they belong, they have ownership, that Waterperry is about them, for them, then that is, I guess, the greatest way in which you can make people feel like, not only do they feel like they have been thought about, but that actually that that is absolutely for them. You're not removing the barrier, you're welcoming them into the door, into the room with you literally. So there's that and then in terms of wider accessibility? You know, we have looked ... recently we've done projects with BSL interpreters, we've talked to local children, local communities, "how can we, I guess, step out from where we are as a site and start to engage more widely as a sector? How can Waterperry be part of the world and, I guess, the arts generally?" So yeah, that ... and I guess, building, not just audiences future, but also maybe building and developing artists for the future or other people for the future. So that's sort of part of our remit. And then in terms of artists, accessibility is really difficult, because, you know when you're starting a company, that you can't really pay everybody that the rates that the Royal Opera House pays, or there are things you can't do that others can do, because the resources are limited, or you haven't got that much experience or your networks are small. So when you start, that's the biggest challenge, because you don't have the years of support and resources behind you. So that's really tough, too. And I think that's a big challenge that lots of young companies trying to overcome is, how can I make sure that our work, our company, is accessible to all the artists we want to work with too? And that's tricky.





R

Rebecca Toal 18:34

Yeah, like, I hadn't even thought about accessibility to the artists. But yeah, you often hear like, I don't know, I've done quite a few gigs where I'm getting paid to do the gig, but the singers are paying to do the gig and you're like, "Wait, what?!"

G

Guy Withers 18:47

Yeah.

R

Rebecca Toal 18:49

That's a big thing, and I wonder whether your experience as a singer yourself has informed to your role now?

G

Guy Withers 18:59

Hugely, absolutely. And I think that's relatively unique. There aren't many...There are a few artistic directors and CEOs that are artists first. But if you look at the big opera houses, they're mostly directors, or they move through producing elsewhere. I feel like I'm an artist, first and foremost, and so I really understand what people are going through and I've struggled through my singing career that I, that I have or have had as well, and I've been those that person that's paid to be part of something thinking "this is gonna be great". But thinking "gosh I'm lucky that I can pay to be part of this training. Who isn't getting this training because of that?" So that's a that's a real important thing, you know, accessibility needs in terms of travel, accommodation...where are these people coming from? We started a young artist programme the first year - it's also five years old this year - and part of the remit of that programme was to deliver something that I wish that I had when I was 21/22 when I came out of university, I had, I knew nothing about how to get into the sector. I felt like I needed more skills, more resources and network but I didn't have the money to do those things and sometimes conservatoire is gonna look a bit out of reach or places that you don't necessarily feel like you belong. So part of, I guess a remit of what we're trying to do with the festival, but also young artists' programme is create a place where people are safe, supported, and at the same time, they don't lose out. So we pay for their travel, we pay for their accommodation, we give them a stipend to look after themselves while they're on our programme. And I guess it's just creating opportunity where people who in ... otherwise would not be able to access the arts at all. So trying to be part of a small solution, and how can we both create and develop accessibility for young people coming through, helping to nurture a more diverse, complete sector of artists, as well as how can we also diversify and encourage new audiences to come to see that work? So it's twofold. And I really believe in that. But it's tricky. It has challenges, and I'm not sure I found the solution. And the solution won't just be me either, or what Watperry does, it will be a whole sector initiative.

R

Rebecca Toal 21:13

Mhmm I'm really curious to hear about the things for you, that have been like, "Ah, this is why I do it." Like, "I can't, you know, I can't wait for the next year because of this element to it", you know, what has been like the most joyful part of it for you in terms of that?

G

Guy Withers 21:33

That's a really interesting question. And I think what's really important to remember is the moment of interaction, and I spend my entire year planning, fundraising, thinking, you know, in spreadsheets, on trains, and you know it's a really good cause and you know, really believe in it, but I don't think you see that until you see the moment when music happens, where theatre happens, where art is created, and audience's faces light up. And I think, what I ...the moments where I feel most relieved and inspired are when people ... audience members come to me, and they say, "I've never seen anything like that before. It's amazing. It's not at all what I expected and I, and I ... it's amazing. And I just feel uplifted, uplifted." You know, I feel like they've gone and had a great time, but also they go home and they feel like, "I feel great today. I feel great today because I had a wonderful time." And I think it's those moments that make me think, "Gosh, this is really worth doing", as well as creating great art and believing that I think the work we do is really awesome. And that I want to be really innovative in the opera sector. Sure. And that I want to provide great entertainment for lots of audiences - great. And I want to help train young artists - fantastic. But I think we all do it because we really believe in the power of music and theatre to transcend. And that I remember being young person and seeing that opera and going "amazing, I want to do that. I just feel awesome now." And I think I want people, every single person that comes to Waterperry to feel that. And when that happens, when people come to me and they say, "I just feel inspired, I feel uplifted. This is great. It's a surprise to me." That that's that's what makes it worth doing all this hard work.

H

Hattie Butterworth 23:17

Mhmm, yeah, that's wonderful.

R

Rebecca Toal 23:19

I wonder whether, because for me, I find that there's a certain sense of like, your work is so impermanent. And I wonder whether there's a certain sense of satisfaction of doing something that feels more documentable? I don't know, I don't know where this question has come from.

H

Hattie Butterworth 23:34

No, I know what you mean, that's cool.

G

Guy Withers 23:34

That's a really cool idea.

R

Rebecca Toal 23:35

Like, I dunno, it's, yeah, as a trumpet player, obviously I enjoy doing concerts but if somebody asks what I do, out of the blue, all I can do is play in the state that I'm in right now. And that's

asks what I do, out of the blue, all I can do is play in the state that I'm in right now. And that's me being like, "this is me." But I wonder whether having the joint thing of being a musician and somebody who creates these massive projects, is there like a sense of satisfaction in "here's what I do, and I can show you"?

G

Guy Withers 24:05

That's a really interesting question, because I'm not sure you can capture what happens in that moment, even if you try to. We've created loads of trailers, people can go on our website now, and they can see the trailers for the next... for this year, or for previous years and highlights reels. And it gives us a sense of what it's like. You can see what it looks like. But I think we'd all agree that you could take a video of what it looks like to be Glastonbury, but I don't ... you know, it must be so different to be there. I've not been to Glastonbury Festival, but I can imagine, you can, you can, you know ... we all know the difference between watching something and experiencing it, right? And I think great to have a way of documenting and showing and sharing that, and I think that encourages more people to be part of that, but ultimately, you can't capture it and I struggle with this because when I'm trying to, say, develop fundraising, or partners or whatever, and I try to tell them what Waterperry's about, they go, "sounds cool but I don't really understand. I don't really get it." You know, why're you taking a piano outside in the wood, why? Or like, why are you doing it? Or I don't really get, I don't really get it. It's so ... it's like these other festivals, but not and that's hard start, particularly when you're talking to established opera audiences or people who know the sector, it's not quite the same. And so I'm always saying, "Come to Waterperry. Come. Come and let me show you." And then they get it. And then they can be advocates for what we do. I find otherwise it's very, very difficult. Its greatest photographs and reviews are ... you can't really do it unless you're there. And I guess because it's not a sterile environment, like a theatre or concert hall... and I always say it's about Glyndebourne. Glyndebourne's great great, and all of the festivals are great, too. But effectively, it's a theatre in the middle of the countryside, yes. But when you walk into a theatre, you could be at the Colly. You could be anywhere else. And so you're seeing a production and it could be any theatre, pretty much. Others might say, "well, it's different theatres." But I think, obviously, you're entering a theatre space. If you come and see a show at Waterperry, it could be raining one day, it could be boiling sun, it could be a hailstorm, and that will affect what happens. We did Hansel and Gretel last year. We basically created a stage in the woodland and Hansel and Gretel took the children off into the wood and we had... it, it was amazing. We had a piano that, a piano that stayed in the woods. So it was very, very sort of tactile and very, very, again very sort of adventurous. Every single day, it was different. Some days it was wet and so it felt very sort of baggy and murky and other days, very windy and so the rustling of the trees sort of meant it feel very sort of spooky in other ways. And that's a set piece you cannot recreate. And so in that way, even the different shows are completely different. And even if you try and capture that, you won't be able to see it because you'll be feeling cold or you'll feel like rain on your jumper or whatever and you can't bottle that unless you do it, so ... it's that visceral experience that really excites me. And so to answer your question, yes, you can bottle a little bit of it and show people but it's not the same as coming and although I feel very proud of the legacy we've built, and I can look back and say, "Wow, five years, 19 productions" (or something that we've done to in those five years), it doesn't feel real until ... you until you're there. It just feels like a dream.

R

Rebecca Toal 27:18

What a great answer

what a great answer.

- H** Hattie Butterworth 27:20  
Yeah, we've talked about it being in the middle of the countryside. But, but what ... without giving the magic away, what do people see when they, when they come? You know, is it...Is it .. are all the performances open air, or is there like a tent or like...?
- G** Guy Withers 27:35  
Great question. Okay.
- H** Hattie Butterworth 27:37  
Wow does it look? What's your...?
- G** Guy Withers 27:38  
How does it look? Well...That's great. So firstly, you turn up at a country estate that's also a garden centre, and a tea shop, so it's a very sort of domestic, I guess, down to earth sort of place because you...
- H** Hattie Butterworth 27:52  
My mother would love it.
- G** Guy Withers 27:53  
Yeah, you're... you can buy...
- R** Rebecca Toal 27:54  
I would love it.
- G** Guy Withers 27:55  
You can buy rosebush, but you could also have the cream tea at the same time. And the thing is actually to centre the community in that in that way so that's great. So if you've turned up, you park in the car park, it's clearly a country estate, like we would know if you went to a National Trust property. So again, not your typical theatre experience. And then yes, you'll walk down the avenue towards the house and you will see a number of marquees with different things marked on them like you know, a hub space or box office or whatever, or bar. And so

those spaces are there and so that sort of thing, you probably would imagine at any sort of festival ... not opera festival but other festivals, you can imagine. So yes, you turn up and you come to the box office, you get your wristband for the different shows you're going to, might get a programme blah, blah, blah. And then one of our stewards will come to you and say "what are you coming to see?" and you'll say, "I'm coming to see blah, blah, blah, (famous opera or whatever)". And they'll say "great, well follow me." And so the stewards will lead you and it depends where - and we and we take up the entire site and build theatres and spaces and all sorts of nooks and crannies around the site - you might be taken into a wood to go and see an opera, or into a ballroom see something else or whatever. And it really depends on which day, at what time and on what you're seeing. So this year, for instance, Mansfield Park is returning - it's one of our favourite productions. It's been going for five years now, that takes place in Waterperry House and we take over the house and it becomes the set for the Regency period Mansfield Park.

H

Hattie Butterworth 29:19

That is cool.

G

Guy Withers 29:20

It's really cool again, so if you like Austin, or you like sort of Regency period, you step in and everyone is covered in head to toe in period costume, including the pianists who ... I do.... Poor musicians. I know you're both musicians. I love integrating musicians into shows because I feel like they often get forgotten and I love being drawn, you know drawing the performative aspect of musicians into the pieces and really, really celebrating that. So for Mansfield Park the two pianists that play on the piano, are both dressed as footman and so they welcome in the audience and they, and they talk and everyone's in their costumes and yes, so you go into the ballroom. That's a very different experience to say our Peter and the Wolf, also at Waterperry this summer, where you get taken into the gardens into a secluded area by the tree, by the pond, and a dancer's tell you the story there. So it depends on the show, depends on the day, what your experience is going to be. And as I said, depending on what the weather's like, you know, it can be a glorious day, or it could be a bit cold, and that will affect what happens. I think it's very exciting.

H

Hattie Butterworth 30:20

It's striking me how like, you seem to be really like, you don't own this festival with like, both hands grabbed onto it, like trying to control it like, I don't know, I feel like you're very much keen for it to be a natural, organic kind of experience, which is...

R

Rebecca Toal 30:43

A shared experience as well.

H

Hattie Butterworth 30:44

Hattie Butterworth 30:11

Yeah! It's a new think to talk ... to hear someone talk about it like that, which is awesome.

Guy Withers 30:49

It really is a shared experience, because I think, as many performers will agree, and hopefully you both do that if you have one person in the audience, or you have 1000 people, it will feel different. And you have to, I guess the the art exists between the two. And so yeah, you have to let go. I mean, I tried to set up everything literally, but also, I guess, as a metaphor for the art to happen and for people to enjoy things. So you have to relinquish control. And also working outdoors is really tricky. And so you're having to look after lots of people, artists, as well as audiences and guide them through what they might not be sure what's gonna happen, you know? So yeah, it's sort of you're, you're a caretaker, really. That's how I see the role.

Rebecca Toal 31:36

I think, yeah, it's often that when you, when we talk to someone that's a CEO, like, you just imagine, I guess, maybe it comes from your role as a singer as well, that you know, you haven't been a Business Director first, that your artisty comes through kind of first and foremost, which is really interesting.

Guy Withers 31:56

Thank you.

Rebecca Toal 31:57

How did you learn to do fundraising and stuff? Was it just on the job?

Hattie Butterworth 32:00

Yeah that was my next question.

Rebecca Toal 32:01

Like, we're trying to do stuff at the moment and we're like, "oh, we hate this."

Hattie Butterworth 32:05

I'm so bad at asking for money.

Guy Withers 32:07

 Guy Williams 32:07

One thing I will say is that I started out wanting to create opera and theatre and music, I didn't start out wanting to be a CEO, but unfortunately, to make sure that that happens, you have to become a CEO and so I've really spent the last five years learning how to be a CEO. I always knew that I could pick the right singers and get the right, you know, people and directors together and make the show, I could always make the show, make sure that can happen. But I didn't know how to create a company. So that's the journey I've been through and including fundraising, including strategy in terms of logistics and team building, and, you know, there's no training for what I do. You can't go to like CEO college. I guess you can go to business school, but it's... but you know, I don't run a company like many other CEOs do, and even Waterperry Opera Festival is very unique in the opera sphere anyway, it's not like running the... like an orchestra or even a big opera company is quite different. So fundraising, a lot of trial and error, and a lot of learning from mentors, people who would speak to me. I always try to speak to as many people as possible who have done it before me, because they have a wealth of knowledge. But it's a lot of trial and error. And a lot of speaking from the heart actually, I find, whether you're talking to a donor, and you're trying to, as I mentioned before, bottle a little bit of that magic and sell it to them, it just takes time. And you certainly get used to asking for money because I think, if you believe in what you're doing, and you know it's really good and, you know if you don't get the money, it's not going to happen, then you soon get out of your mind the thought of "Oh, I feel awkward about asking for money", because you're just thinking, "I need the money to make sure it happens. And I know if you give it to me, it's gonna go to a fantastic cause, much better than perhaps other causes, I don't know." And so you get used to that, so I do quite a lot of that and, and I, you know, try to develop relationships with donors, and people who, from the very beginning of the festival have really invested, in many different ways, in what we do, and hopefully they see the benefit, they see how special it is and they become advocates and start to, I guess, become ambassadors and encourage others to get involved just to come or just to, you know, help out in however they can. And then other fundraising, trusts and foundations, Arts Council...that takes a lot of time. And you need to have loads of things sorted, like "what's your mission? And what's your vision, and what's your constitution and what's your objectives?" All these sorts of things. And so, that's been a big learning curve. But eventually, we got there, and we've grown and grown and grown, but it's a lot of trial and error. And my own experience really is fundraising for opera and for music education, really. So I don't... I can't offer any immediate advice on fundraising for a podcast, but it's really interesting and I actually think it's one thing that a lot of people in this sector could wish that they knew more about. "How can I ... I have the initiative to make my own projects", for instance, "I want to see this happen. I want to start this ensemble, I want to do this, but I don't know how to make it happen. And I know it's really good, but how to do I do that?" If only there was a place where that can happen. Not just that, but, you know, "how do I do my self assessment tax return? How do I know how to become ... get a business account?" All that sort of stuff, they don't teach you that at college. And so that's really important stuff that actually I think is stopping a lot of people with great ideas, doing things. So we try to do a little bit of that at Waterperry for the Young Artists' Programme, but it's difficult. And luckily, I had people around me, I built a board of people who could support me and the rest of the... rest of the team. But it's hard, effectively trial and error, learning, learning a lot, and now it's mostly what I do. I sit in front of my laptop, and I just try and think about the health of Waterperry. How can we, as I said, think about the next five years, rather than just this year? Because if I can do five more years, I know I can reach a lot more people.

 Hattie Butterworth 36:05

What's Next

wow. yeah.

**R** Rebecca Toal 36:06

You talk about, yeah, trial and error a lot, and because this is Things Musicians Don't Talk About, would you feel comfortable talking about some of the errors?

**G** Guy Withers 36:15

Yeah. Gosh, I mean, there's a lot of ...

**H** Hattie Butterworth 36:18

Yes, Rebecca, I'm so glad you asked the question.

**G** Guy Withers 36:20

No, because there's a lot of risk, there's a lot of risk in so many ways. There's artistic risk, because you're saying, "okay, director, designer, musical director, cast, go off and do this show. I really believe in you that it's gonna look great. I mean, I think it's gonna be great. And the audience is gonna love it." And I would say almost all the...almost the entirety of the time, it comes back really well, and everybody loves it. But sometimes, you know, things happen. And you have to deal with people and deal with working with, with teams and that's where it gets really rewarding, but also very difficult, because lots of people are working together, lots of freelancers coming together to work on a project and there could be tensions. And that can be really tricky. And so again, a lot of my time, when I'm not looking at money, I'm looking at the people, how I can support them, and deal with the things that do go wrong, when people aren't supported, or there's been miscommunication, or it's been a fallout, and that happens all the time, like it would be in any situation. So that's, that's the tough stuff. And that's where you learn very quickly how to handle that. And you have to just be accountable for your mistakes. You know, whether I haven't been there for an artist that needed someone to be there. And I'm also responsible as a person at the top of the pecking order. Or it's been a mistake in the contract, and someone's been left hanging or something, that's on me, you know, and you learn from those. I've learned something over the last five years and that is, it's not the mistake you make, it's how you then deal with that mistake, because I will make lots of mistakes, because I'm learning and people do and that's fine. But as long as you say, "look, I did it wrong and I'm sorry, and, you know, it wasn't malicious. Here's how I'm gonna make it right for you." That, that's been a really, really good learning curve for me. But there are lots of things that have gone wrong, for sure. And you know, money as well, you know, we're a growing organisation, and you put a lot of money into a project, and then maybe no one comes to see it. You know, or, you know, that and that's really ...

**H** Hattie Butterworth 38:27

I'd give up!



G

Guy Withers 38:29

And that's really scary. Because you're putting your life and soul into "I love this product. I want everyone to see it." And then one person comes, you know, thankfully, that's not happened much. But, but it could, could do. Particularly when you do something really wacky. They go "Ooh, no thank you" And then you think, "oh, gosh, well, I'll just do, I'll just do all the normal stuff then because people want that." So that's really, really tricky to sort of feel like "actually, I believe in this vision. I believe in making this work and doing these things." So you've got to really, I guess, encourage people to come to you. It's tough. It's tough, for sure. But yeah, I mean, other mistakes, I guess, trying to put a piano in a boggy woodland, I wouldn't recommend that.

H

Hattie Butterworth 39:09

I was worrying about that.

G

Guy Withers 39:10

Yeah...you know, trying to get ... because of course, and this is one thing I didn't really realise when I started an opera festival but it's not the middle of the city, so when it ... night comes, there's no light at all in middle of the forest. And so "okay, you need torches to do things" and then if it rains, "okay, how are you gonna get the lorry or the van with the piano that you've just bought down this muddy path through a wood to get ... I know. So there's things like that. And then of course, you provide this piano for a lovely pianist, and they say, "What is this?" And I say, "I know, I know." And I think part of it is just trying to get everybody on board with the vision and understanding that it's not always gonna go quite as planned. But if we get there in the end, it's going to be great. So it's a lot of those logistical things. And again, I'm not an ... I haven't been an expert in putting together marquees or organising lorries, but I've had to very quickly. Last year, I'll tell you the funny, funny, a funny thing that went wrong. Here we go. We had a lighting designer design a lighting for our production of Elixir of Love on budget. Great, fantastic. It got to about a month before. And my production manager said, "this light, how is it going to get to Watperry, this lighting?" and I said, "Oh, it will be on the van won't it? The van's on the hire quote." And he said, "No, no, we paid just for the lights but the lights are going to be in London. You know, we need to pick them up. That's not included in the price." And I ... and then we suddenly went to like loads of lorry quoter, you know, to get quotes, and they were like, "yeah, we can do it for 1000 pounds" and I thought, "Oh my god." So I had to crawl to my board and say "I need 1000 pounds, please, so I can get the lights to make sure that the show's gonna be seen by everybody," you know. And so sometimes those things happen. Hattie, your face looks like you're in terror.

H

Hattie Butterworth 41:04

It just seems like nothing will stop you Guy. Cos' I would honestly have ran away and cried. And just not come back.

G

Guy Withers 41:14

And it's tough. It's really tough. You know, and I know you guys talk about mental health, that is really hard. You know, I feel the personal responsibility to make sure that everybody gets paid, it all happens. And...

H

Hattie Butterworth 41:24

That's a lot of stress.

G

Guy Withers 41:24

... if it doesn't, it's on me. And that's really tough. Luckily, I've got a really supportive and really dedicated team that also work really hard. And we're all workaholics too, so taking breaks and going on holiday, that's as important as making sure that everything comes in on time. But also having people around you and that's people like my fiancée, my friends, also a board, and we have a non-executive board because we're a charity, so lots of people who on this board can help support, they can look over a contract if I need some help, or they might be able to, you know, take something off my hands if I need to. Because I'm young and my team is young and we're small and we're really ambitious, but we don't always know what we're doing, and we need support. And that support wasn't always in the professional sphere, it can be personally. And there are so many times we've been at Waterperry and we're up late because the marquee's got a hole in it and it's pouring with rain on to the stage. How are we going to resolve that? It has to be resolved. And so you have to make it happen. So I've learned to just, I guess, make it happen somehow, and believe that it will happen. You have to embrace the fear.

R

Rebecca Toal 42:31

Once the festival's over, do you find it hard to not jump straight into the next year's swing of things? Or do you take a break?

G

Guy Withers 42:42

I do take a break. I have to, because I really need it physically as well as mentally. My fiancée will tell you that I will finish and I will literally almost fall asleep for days because I've spent everything. In terms of the next year I've tried to - and this has taken five years - I've tried to move to a system where I think about next year now. So in fact, I've got a meeting with a board member this next week and I'm meeting my musical director next week to talk about next year. Can we get plans next year down, just so that I haven't got to think about it immediately after the festival? You know, and so if we get things moving, I can then take a week off and I can go on holiday or I can just stay in bed and watch something on Netflix. But as much as I really don't want to touch anything Waterperry related for a while, the itch comes back really quickly. Really quickly I want to get back and I want to think about the future. I think that makes me feel like I'm doing the right thing, that my body and my brain is saying "yeah, I need a break but you know, a week? I really want to get back in and start again." That's, that's really good. If I haven't got that then I shouldn't be here. So yeah, but breaks are really important.

H Hattie Butterworth 43:54  
Wow.

G Guy Withers 43:54  
The only other time I get a break is really at Christmas.

H Hattie Butterworth 43:56  
Of course.

G Guy Withers 43:57  
Because, because because you know, casting happens immediately and we got it, you know, takes a long time to put an opera on. And the Royal Opera House will take years to do it. We just take a year. So it's a long process.

R Rebecca Toal 44:10  
Wow, I didn't realise that. To be honest, I was thinking you were gonna say "yeah, I have a break and I start again in January."

G Guy Withers 44:15  
Oh gosh.

H Hattie Butterworth 44:18  
That's how I would run it.

R Rebecca Toal 44:20  
Hattie!

H Hattie Butterworth 44:20  
I'd have three months off, four months on...

R Rebecca Toal 44:23  
People don't run businesses like we run the podcast.

H Hattie Butterworth 44:26  
Oh fine. I forgot. That is so interesting. I mean, I'm, I'm really interested now in you as an artist and a singer because it's so clear that you've been put on this earth to run Waterperry festival.

G Guy Withers 44:39  
Thank you Hattie.

H Hattie Butterworth 44:40  
No, seriously, but also, it's, you know, as I know my brother was a chorister... that doesn't leave you, that like innate musicality and, you know, it's been with you for a long time and it can you talk about how you stay artistically kind of satisfied or how do you sing as well? Or, or, you know, how do you balance those two?

G Guy Withers 45:05  
That is a great question. And I always think about that, because as I said, I think of myself first and foremost as an artist, and then as somebody who's a producer, and you're right, singing has very strict rules, particularly being a chorister which I was, and I was a choral scholar and a lay clerk as well. That life wasn't really for me, I must admit. I loved the singing, but didn't like the strict rules. And I've now run a festival that doesn't really have rules. So, and even, you know, being at a conservatoire and doing a Master's, I felt like a black sheep. I didn't quite feel like I fitted in there either. But I do miss treading the boards. I love the buzz of, of performing and being on stage and telling stories. I love telling stories, and watching people perform at Waterperry, and not being part of that, I guess, very intimately, I get sad, I think I miss it. I miss it. So how do I keep that alive? Well, I still sing a bit, but I haven't got a lot of time. So I miss being on stage, but I don't have time to do it. So I still do some concerts, and that's great. But I do direct, so I enjoy that. And so the Peter and the Wolf that I directed last year, and is reviving, that was ... I directed that. And there was a, there was a part of me that just felt like that needed to happen that that piece, that production needs to be out in the world, and I wanted to see it happen. So being connected that way, by directing dancers and directing musicians, that makes you feel connected to the art, but performing less and less so unfortunately, and maybe that's because you can't do it, you can't do both. I think if I sang it Waterperry, if it was a vehicle for me as a singer, I would be too much entwined. I need to stay distant because I need to be the person at the head of the organisation that if something happens, I need to be able to step up and make a decision or stay impartial or, or be a figurehead. I can't be also singing in the show. So that's really important for me, to know that it's not my place.

H Hattie Butterworth 47:08

I really like the idea, or not the idea, the fact of, of you know, having a very involved directive role in what you do can, you know, create the satisfaction in maybe a different way to which it did in the past, but in a way that's still you know, very tangible to you. Because I actually feel like I'm becoming more and more veering that way myself with what we do, you know, on the podcast, and even what I do in my day job in the music publishers, like I do feel like "ah, like, okay, I'm not playing anymore, but there's like a new kind of artistic satisfaction that through...

G

Guy Withers 47:45

Absolutely.

H

Hattie Butterworth 47:46

... through this" like, yeah, I feel like that's that's one thing that that's not massively much discussed, of there being an ability for us to have this, you know, very nice experience of being a performer. And then maybe thinking, "Oh, this is now my time to become something slightly different." It's almost like a tennis player retiring, becoming a tennis coach, but not quite.

G

Guy Withers 48:13

Yeah, exactly.

H

Hattie Butterworth 48:14

But it is a different thing, isn't it? But they still have that same satisfaction from coaching. Anyway, I don't know if that made any sense.

G

Guy Withers 48:21

It does. It does make sense, you feel connected, you're still being part of the magic, but in a different way. And I think I'm okay with that. I'm okay with that. I miss it. I miss being on stage, but I also know that actually, I think my place is off of it. And helping others to be on it instead.

R

Rebecca Toal 48:41

When you do sing, how does it feel, going back to it?

G

Guy Withers 48:47

Now, it feels like picking up a bike after years of not riding one, which is thrilling, but also really scary because you're like, "how do I move my legs? And how do I steer?" And so I might do the odd concert or something, which is really exciting, and I love it. And I guess I do it now for more

the pleasure as much as you know it helps as a part of my career. Yeah, I feel equal amounts sort of unprepared and also excited, whereas before, I think when I did a lot more singing, it felt like a job. And so in a way I get best of both worlds because I get to step up there and do my singing and it might be the only concert I have within months. And so it feels special and it doesn't feel like a job, but I also do feel rusty and I certainly do feel rusty, I feel like "oh gosh, have I got... ? Where are my cufflinks?" and, "how do I do this again? I haven't sung this in ages." You know and so there is something about you need to keep practising, literally, but also you to keep, I guess, on that train if you're, if you're a musician, you're a performer you you need to keep that part of your brain and your body working and going and I think you lose a bit of it if you don't exercise it so particularly the singing, the voice can get literally a bit rusty so getting you know, keeping that fresh is is tricky, for sure.

R

Rebecca Toal 50:06

Does it feel different, apart from the rusty of the side of it...

G

Guy Withers 50:09

Yeah.

R

Rebecca Toal 50:09

but like, psychologically does performing feel different to you now?

G

Guy Withers 50:14

I think I, I think it gives perspective a bit more, sort of stepping back in on if I could go on stage again, I can look back at the people organising the concert and sort of think "I know what that's like", the same way where I can look at people who are singing on stage and and say, "I know what that's like". And so I feel very lucky to be like that. I think there is a wonderful warm glow of organising things, you know, and you get to feel proud, and you get great gratitude and sort of, you know, it feels amazing to make things happen. But there's nothing like the visceral adrenaline rush of performing. And I think that sort of skydiving feel that you get when you perform, that's an amazing drug, and it's, and I really see what people love it, and I loved it too. So yeah, I miss that. I do miss that.

R

Rebecca Toal 51:10

Well, I'm really would love to hear sort of to finish off a little bit. What is the ... actually first of all, can you give us the details for the festival? How can people get involved? How can they follow you on social media? That sort of thing? First of all.

G

Guy Withers 51:28

Yeah, of course.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 51:28

And then, after that, you can let us know your highlight that you think people should not miss.

**G** Guy Withers 51:36

Ooh, now that's gonna be tough cos I'll have to name my favourite child won't I? That's basically what I have to do. So, so Waterperry, okay, so it's in August, this this summer, as it always is. It's the 12th to the 20th of August this year at Waterperry in Oxfordshire and there are many different productions you can come and see. But you don't have to necessarily just be an audience member, you can volunteer. You can come and you can be a steward or you can get involved and you can be part of the festival as well. And if you're an aspiring singer, there's a young artist programme to look out for for next year. And if you're an artist too, you know, please get in touch and we have a website ([waterperryoperafestival.co.uk](http://waterperryoperafestival.co.uk)), but also we're on all the social media, so Instagram, and Twitter and Facebook. You can find us there and keep a lookout because we've got lots of things coming including our tour of Mansfield Park, which is actually going around the country right the second.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 52:29

Oh my gosh, cool. I didn't know that!

**G** Guy Withers 52:31

Yeah. Oh, yeah. Sorry. I didn't mention that. Yeah, so ...

**H** Hattie Butterworth 52:34

No, no, no, it's not your fault.

**G** Guy Withers 52:36

So, Mansfield Park, which I mentioned before, in our ballroom, we're taking it on tour this year for the first time.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 52:42

Ah wow, congrats!

**G** Guy Withers 52:43

- G** Guy Withers 52:43  
Thank you. We've just been in Dorset, we're going to be in Newbury next week. And then we're going to be in all around the country basically. And it's a...
- H** Hattie Butterworth 52:51  
All the Austen places.
- G** Guy Withers 52:52  
All the Austen places and we're trying to ... we're taking it to all these beautiful sort of periods spots, so ballrooms and galleries and old manor houses, so umm...
- H** Hattie Butterworth 53:01  
Are you going to Bath?
- G** Guy Withers 53:02  
We wish. If there was somebody in Bath listening in on your podcast, who has ...
- H** Hattie Butterworth 53:08  
There will be!
- G** Guy Withers 53:08  
A big - great - but if they have a big period ballroom...
- R** Rebecca Toal 53:14  
Yeah, that sounds like all our listeners,
- G** Guy Withers 53:16  
...then, then that person, definitely get in touch.
- H** Hattie Butterworth 53:19  
Please, because...



R Rebecca Toal 53:20  
We should do an advert.

G Guy Withers 53:21  
There we go.

H Hattie Butterworth 53:22  
Actually my best friend Jasmine's from Bath. But yeah, she doesn't have a ballroom bless her.

R Rebecca Toal 53:27  
Yet.

G Guy Withers 53:28  
But does Jasmine know any ballrooms?

R Rebecca Toal 53:32  
Does she have any memberships to ballrooms?

H Hattie Butterworth 53:36  
You'll get there, you'll get to Bath. This has to happen. I'm so inspired.

R Rebecca Toal 53:39  
We'll make it happen.

G Guy Withers 53:42  
So there we go.

H Hattie Butterworth 53:43  
Well, that's awesome. So to finish off, we have started asking our guests for the little win of the

week, or in our case of the day, because we last did this last night. So we'll ... unless you have one that you're sure of right now, we're happy to go first.

**G** Guy Withers 54:02

Go first, because I'm trying to think of the things that have happened.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 54:04

Yeah, so anything that has been like a little victory, however small, that's been like, "ah", because we realised that like, a lot of the time in this podcast, we focus on my very serious topics, quite intense, but let's finish it off with something a bit more cheerful. So, Rebecca, over to you.

**R** Rebecca Toal 54:24

My win of the day is that ... I was gonna say I only had two coffees, but I'm gonna say that I let Stuart, my boyfriend, help me with a bunch of things. Like, he drove me to college, and he cooked me dinner and I wasn't like, "no, don't do that." Well, I was a little bit, but ...

**H** Hattie Butterworth 54:47

But not enough.

**R** Rebecca Toal 54:47

I let him do it. Yeah.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 54:50

That's awesome.

**R** Rebecca Toal 54:51

I'm also just like plugging, Stuart.

**H** Hattie Butterworth 54:54

He's great. He's the best.



G Guy Withers 54:54  
Go Stuart! Go Stuart!

R Rebecca Toal 54:56  
Yeah, exactly. Honestly, Stuart, needs an award. That man. He is very nice. Urm, Hattie? So I've actually had a huge win today at my work. I've just been feeling really anxious about like the next step, and everything and I've realised as a person, and actually probably like, as a woman, a lot of the time we do a lot of hinting. Personally, I'm not very good at asking for what I want, or communicating how I feel in a position, as I say, terrible about asking for money ... it's kind of the same thing. But today, I just had this like real 'yes' moment where they announced to me that they're going to be advertising for a new assistant job. And I'm an intern so I was like, "D'you know what? I'm going to tell the CEO that I'm really interested in the job, that I have no plans where my internship finishes, and that I'd love to be considered if possible." And for some reason, just saying those words to someone that I've like hugely admired, was the most terrifying thing ever to like, advocate for myself, or to tell someone what I want or what I'm planning to do. You know, whatever comes of it, I'm like, "shit, that is a win." Because I've never spoken like that to someone before, being like, "this is this is actually what I want." You know? Yeah.

G Guy Withers 56:21  
That's amazing.

H Hattie Butterworth 56:22  
A big win. Big win for Tuesday.

G Guy Withers 56:24  
That's great. That's amazing.

H Hattie Butterworth 56:25  
Thank you. Thanks. What about you Guy? Have you thought of your win?

G Guy Withers 56:29  
I did think of one but it's a bit heavier, sorry. Is that okay?

H Hattie Butterworth 56:32  
No! Heavv. veah!

...not heavy, yeah.

**R** Rebecca Toal 56:32  
No, that's great!

**G** Guy Withers 56:33  
Well just to say that something really wonderful that happened. So it came out of a sad place, and that, so we had our first performance of Mansfield Park a couple days ago, and a week ago, one of our actors went... performers went down with COVID. So really sad for her that she couldn't perform, but also it's jeopardising the entire tour that suddenly, one person can't perform. Luckily, we could find somebody to step in. And Mansfield Park's not a really well-known opera. It's not just like, "come and step in and sing, you know, Figaro". It's like, a really unique thing, but we found somebody, a young singer. And what was really amazing for them was, they had learned the role before, but because of COVID, the production was cancelled. So they'd learnt it, they'd spent all this time in 2020 learning this role, and it was cancelled and that was their experience. And it just happened that the role we needed was the one that she had learned, and so she could have her debut of the role. She came and sang it and I just felt so pleased for her that she finally was able to sing the role that she'd put so much time and effort into learning and that we could give her that and that something so sad, having one of our singers go down, that we can welcome somebody new to the family was great.

**R** Rebecca Toal 57:45  
That's amazing!

**H** Hattie Butterworth 57:46  
That's so great.

**R** Rebecca Toal 57:47  
I want to cry!

**H** Hattie Butterworth 57:48  
But Guy, the fact that your win about someone else.

**G** Guy Withers 57:51  
Oh! Yeah! It wasn't about me!

H Hattie Butterworth 57:54

I just can't with you! This is this has been too wholesome this conversation, I swear.

R Rebecca Toal 58:00

Yeah, this has been really lovely.

H Hattie Butterworth 58:02

It's been such a pleasure to talk to you. You have been such a lovely guest. Thank you so much.

G Guy Withers 58:08

My pleasure. Thank you so much both of you. Really, really enjoyed talking to you.

R Rebecca Toal 58:16

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