

The Real Work: A Podcast About Theater Culture and Transformative Justice

Episode 1: A Kind of Origin Story

TIERRA: The Real Work: A Podcast About Theater Culture and Transformative Justice. What does it really mean to practice transformative justice? Could doing so heal patterns of oppression, violence, and abuse, and grow communities where everyone thrives? What about in the theater community? Where would we even start? This six-episode audio series tells the story of 27 theater practitioners on unceded Lisjan Ohlone territory who gathered regularly for one year to explore using transformative justice, or TJ, in our creative spaces and our lives. We were guided by one of the founders of the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective, Mia Mingus. This podcast is a report back and an invitation. May we invest in the real work it will take to end and heal all levels of violence for ourselves, our communities, and our future generations.

Music

TIERRA: Welcome, welcome, welcome. I am so glad you are here. It's taken a lot to finally arrive at this moment with you. Let me explain. My name is Tierra, and I'm a theater artist. I've been living on unceded Chochoenyospeaking Lisjan Ohlone territory for over a decade now, on land first called Huchiun, and also known as Oakland, California. Here I've created, performed, taught, and produced works of theater. I've also been organized by local movements for indigenous sovereignty, for solutions to the displacement, homelessness, and housing crises, and to defund the police and create a world where Black Lives Matter. In 2019, I stepped into a role that braided my artistic work and my movement work by becoming a core organizer of an initiative to explore how transformative justice might prevent, address, and heal harm oppressing my theater community. Originally, this podcast was supposed to drop in – wait for it – March 2020. I remember my co-organizer, SK Kerastas, working with other folks from the training year on the premiere event all while we raced to get the first episode finished in time. Covid put a sharp halt to all of that as mutual aid and other forms of organizing took priority. But the need for this report back and for transformative justice never stopped. And so, here we are. Originally, SK and I were going to co-host the series and make a lot of jokes about that MTV show The Real World. Back then we worked together at California Shakespeare Theater, or Cal Shakes, producing programs at the intersection of theater, community, and social change, and working to shift the inherited culture at our legacy white nonprofit employer toward something more liberatory. This episode you'll be hearing interviews, conversations, and other audio we recorded together, with the help of our producing partners, We Rise Production, back in 2019, some of it before our training year was even over. I'll let SK introduce themselves.

SK: Hi. I'm SK Kerastas, a queer, trans, artist, organizer, and facilitator. My background is in queer and trans youth theater in Chicago, and I now live in the Bay Area. I am a dancer, a lover, and a fierce cancer sun sign.

TIERRA: *[Laughs]* Can confirm. As for me, Tierra, I am bringing my lenses as a black, queer, femme woman with a heart for decolonization, reparations, and abolition to the telling of this story. I have ancestors from multiple continents, but my perspective is colored by living on Turtle Island, in the colonial bounds of the so-called United States, for nearly all my life. Where even when both my parents worked full time, I still relied on my public schools' meal programs. Shout out and deep gratitude for the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense for laying that blueprint. I want to name all this and could name more, to honor the complexity of being the single sieve through which the experiences of dozens of folks is being shared with y'all. So, y'all ready to get into The Real Work? *[sings, in the style of "Back to Cali" by Notorious B.I.G.]* We're go-ing go-ing, back, back, to 2019.

Music break, opening of "Back to Cali" by Notorious B.I.G.

SK: Hi. I'm SK Kerastas.

TIERRA: Greetings, I'm Tierra Allen.

SK & TIERRA: And we are the hosts of –

TIERRA: The Real Work: A podcast about theater culture and transformative justice. SK and I both spent about 12 months learning about transformative justice last year, eight daylong sessions, many organizing meetings, a fair amount of processing and holding space, envisioning for ourselves and the relationships in our lives.

SK: What do we do when harm or violence happens in our theater spaces? I'm talking about sexual harassment, racism, sexism, sexual assaults, homophobia, transphobia, boundary crossing, non-consensual, coercive rehearsal spaces. I mean, really, what happens? Who takes action? Is there even a response? What is the process? Whose experience is centered? Who is protected? Who's asked to get over it, to forgive, to be quiet? Who is vilified? Who is supported? What is shared out publicly? Who gets work afterwards? How have we seen all this go, or rather, not go? Can we find a better way through?

TIERRA: This podcast tells the story of 27 theater professionals in the Bay Area who gathered regularly over the course of 2019 to wrestle with these questions, learn about transformative justice as one way to answer them, and try to use it in our theater spaces.

SK: We were guided and taught by one of the founders of the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective, Mia Mingus. She is a powerhouse writer, educator, and community organizer for disability justice and transformative justice.

TIERRA: This podcast is basically our share-out from that experience.

SK: We're including optional exercises at the end of each episode, really as a bridge to your own work, for folks who want to go deeper as they're listening. We have resources and reference material for stuff that's mentioned within the episodes and that will live on the website and in the podcast description.

TIERRA: As you heard earlier, we'll be referencing different forms of harm, violence, and abuse throughout this podcast. So, we invite you to take care of yourselves on this journey. You can always take a break, take a pause, and come back. You can always take breaths. Please take care of yourselves. We've learned that many stories of harm are resonant and evocative of one another. And we want you to be as well as possible on this journey with us. And lastly, for now, we want this podcast to be for folks who know that theater can be life-giving, and who have also experienced how damaging our practices can be. It's for folks who want to participate in dreaming up new worlds where violence is healed and not perpetuated and where we all are safe, whole, and thriving. If you are interested in this kind of change, then this podcast is for you.

SK: Thank you for sticking with us. We realize this is a really long intro for the series, but we wanna make sure that you get set up right for this story. So, let's just take a pause and breathe and regroup for a moment.

Three breaths

TIERRA: As we learned, this kind of grounding work is key for TJ, and for any kind of real work for accountability, healing, and culture change.

Music

TIERRA: Episode 1: A Kind of Origin Story. So, SK, how did we get here?

SK: *[Laughs]* Okay. Well, let's jump back about two and a half years. It's the summer and fall of 2017. And let's paint the picture. There was a lot going on just culturally in the US around sexual violence in a way that we really hadn't seen before. The #MeToo Movement had started, and men in multiple industries were being named publicly for sexual harm, assaults, and manipulation. We're talking Harvey Weinstein, Junot Diaz, Louis CK, Aziz Ansari, and like many others. It felt like this action and momentum was happening in the theater realm as well. The Chicago Reader published an expose about Profiles Theatre and the years and years of toxic sexual manipulation that happened there by the former artistic director. And from that came #notinourhouse, a pilot organizing project trying to get theaters to commit to certain standards and practices of consent and equity.

TIERRA: Also, there was a growing conversation around intimacy choreography, or consent-based, specialized direction for intimate moments onstage, analogous to fight

choreography. And at home in the Bay Area, we saw protests and organizing in response to Marin Theatre Company's production of *Thomas & Sally*. I was part of a coalition of black women theater makers in the Bay who organized against racism and sexism in that production. And, SK, you were actually a facilitator for a conversation between our group and MTC during that time.

SK: Yeah, all of this information and news contributed to this energy, this agency and momentum that was like, oh, we can say something now, we can like do something, and people will listen. And at Cal Shakes, where Tierra and I work, we had a bunch of incidents take place, it felt like all at once. So, someone called in and reported experiencing sexual assault by an employee at Cal Shakes 20 years after the fact, and it happened back when she had been a young person. A cast of actors then approached artistic leadership, asking for mediation support with racism, misogyny, and repeated inappropriate sexual advances of a director towards a student intern in a rehearsal room at a different theater company. And the artistic director at Cal Shakes, Eric Ting, three years into his tenure, experienced something that hit even closer to home.

ERIC: My name is Eric Ting; I am the Artistic Director of California Shakespeare Theater. So, about two and half years ago, I got a phone call from a reporter at the New York Times. And he was asking me about my former boss, Gordon Edelstein, who was the Artistic Director at Long Wharf Theater where I had spent about ten years, part of which as Associate Artist and Director. And the questions that he was asking had to do largely with an audition that Gordon and I had been in for a show that I directed at Long Wharf, and there had been some postings on social media about those auditions. And he was asking me if I had been aware of or witness to these sorts of problematic behaviors that they were investigating. And I think that at the time, I remember I got the phone call. And I finished the phone call, and I remember going, oh, wow. What was that? What just happened? And you know, there had been whispers in the field that The New York Times was preparing, a large expose on harmful behaviors in the American theater, focusing on a whole list of artists and administrators. And I sort of got wind of that in the way that we get wind of it, and then it suddenly turned very, very personal in that moment. And I remember sort of getting off of that phone call and going home and spending a good long time just thinking about what I remembered and what I didn't remember. And like so much, I think reflecting backwards, was harmful behavior I just sort of saw as par for the course.

SK: Mm.

ERIC: We would joke all the time, right, that Gordon was a force of nature, and that he would show up in the middle of a building or the office or of a process, and he would turn things around in sometimes in literal ways. And then everyone would just sort of adapt to it. And holding that behavior as normal, right? So, suffice to say at the end of that day, I think I reached out to you. It was very shortly after this phone call. And I'd been feeling it already anyhow. There had been some friends of mine who had organized a town hall at the public theater in New York City around this time. And it felt imperative to me that we – and I don't mean we, Cal Shakes. I was

like more, it was like we, the Bay Area Theater community, kind of take a moment to reflect upon what was happening here and whether or not there was harm being done in a way that wasn't like being meaningfully addressed, which there was and there obviously always is kind of thing, and wanting to just sort of see if there was a way where we could contribute to a conversation about it.

SK: Mm. What I remember from that moment, like acutely, is you being like, we gotta do something, right? And I was like, yes. And you were like, can you do something? And I was like, if it can be part of my job and I can let go of something else. And you were like, yes, okay. Let's talk it out. So, for me that was actually a really important part of it. I organized a group of intentionally diverse people, right? Wanted it to be at least half people of color, wanted folks who don't have positional power like in an organization or in like a theater context in the room. Also wanted people with positional power in the room, wanted representation from theaters. And I think we engaged like a group of like 30 people or so, and we met pretty regularly to co-organize this Town Hall. We were able to give folks some stipends for doing that organizing work. And we invited Laura Penn, the Executive Director –

ERIC and SK: – of SDC.

SK: And then we also invited the head of the Actors Equity Association. Because we wanted to see from the Town Hall essentially like what processes were already in place. Those folks like gave some information and talked; they talked about starting up a hotline. And essentially what I thought was gave the message like, if you see something, say something. If something is going on, contact us, or what have you, which is legit and a genuine effort. And I think the more we learn about this stuff, like puts all the onus on the person in the least amount of power to be taking action, which is the place that we're already in the first place. In addition to those speakers, we invited Kyra Jones, a sex educator in Chicago and actor who went through a TJ process with BYP100, and then Adrienne Sky Roberts. And they kind of co-led a presentation about transformative justice. I had heard about transformative justice from Kim Tran who said, maybe you should think about transformative justice. And I was like, what's that? And the minute I started learning about it from Adrienne, I just felt inspired. It felt like oh, this was a path forward, whereas like I felt like the systems in place weren't a path forward, right? It's like, what do you do when the systems aren't working?

Music break

TIERRA: So that event, called It's Time: Bay Area Town Hall on Sexual Harassment in Our Theatre Community, happened in February 2018. Over 200 folks came out to hear the presentations and dialogue in breakout groups. Wellness practitioners were hired to support anyone emotionally triggered during the evening, which definitely happened. Resources were shared, next steps were hazy. And I want to acknowledge here that not everyone who attended the event left ignited by TJ. Even some of the theater practitioners who helped organize the event were skeptical of its applicability to some of the specific situations in the community, which

I think is fair. But in staff conversations at Cal Shakes, we saw potential. What might shift if we invested in transformative justice as one of many possible strategies for uprooting harm in our community? Here is SK describing where we went next, in a conversation we recorded with the other two core organizers of the training year. You'll hear more from us later in the series.

SK: Folks were really curious about TJ work. I think some people were like hell no, this is like some woo-woo shit, you know, like this is not gonna work, this can't be institutionalized, right? And yeah, of course, right? That is a given. And also like, what other proposals forward do we have? Like, not a lot. Jumping ahead we realized we didn't want to continue asking folks for like free labor to organize. Cal Shakes applied for a grant, like just asked our contact at the Irvine Foundation what avenue we could take to get funding for this. We partnered with Mia Mingus of the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective. She said, yes, I'll help y'all learn about this stuff. We got a grant to be able to pay her and the BATJC. And then we held a couple public TJ 101 sessions. And basically, I think in total maybe 70 or 80 folks came to those. And from that we asked people like, okay, now that you have a sense of like what this is, who wants to take a deep dive into learning with us? So, us sitting here at the table as the SEED group, we are the leadership group and have been organizing and working really closely with Mia to shape what this learning and training is. And we have committed to eight daylong sessions with her throughout the year.

SARAH: My name is Sarah Williams. I am the Managing Director at California Shakespeare Theatre, also known as Cal Shake, here in the Bay Area So, I volunteered to join this leadership team that we are calling the SEED group, which I just love. I think I always tend to gravitate toward leadership roles. It's just my blessing and my curse. But I think that I also felt a sense of responsibility working at the time at one of the larger institutions in the Bay Area to be like a bigger part of kind of what this process was going to be and to have a voice and have a say in the direction of it. That was kind of part of the reason that I volunteered for the SEED group. Initially, I mean, I didn't really know what to expect going in. I truly didn't. And I don't have a ton of experience in organizing, community organizing, or anything like that. So, I was kind of coming in like very fresh. And we came into the room thinking we're gonna like address harm now, we are going to do an accountability process, we are going to be able to respond in a way that in actuality just takes time, patience, like so much support.

SK: Yeah. I think some of our early ideas – which Mia has like reflected back now and totally made fun of us, you know. *[Laughs]* We're like, let's hold a space where like anyone who like IDs as a survivor of harm that has happened within like a theater context can just like come, and we'll hold space for them. You know what I mean? And Mia was like, please don't do that. You know, like do you all even have like the internal capacities to like hold that kind of space? Like what are your frameworks that you're coming from? You know what I mean? There's like none of us are like trained in that kind of work, A. B, like then what? Right? So, like everyone's there sharing their traumatizing stories. Like, then what? This was like also a pattern that we're seen a lot in theater. Folks are like, yeah, so we're going to do something, invite survivors to share, and

they do with this expectation that some action will be taken. And then when it's not, it's like this betrayal.

TIERRA: Thank goodness for Mia Mingus and for the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective. Being able to learn from and compensate folks who had been autonomously organizing community interventions to violence, and training up community in their methods, for years? Honestly, still feels miraculous to me. Along with her passion and wisdom, Mia modeled for us how to weave a sense of humor and play into work that can get very, very heavy.

MIA: I'm really sorry for whoever has to edit this. Is it recording right now?

VOICE: Yeah.

MIA: Okay. I'm sorry in advance, you all. Okay. Hi. *[Laughs]* Hi. My name is Mia Mingus, and I work with the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective out here. And I was a founding core member, and I'm super excited to be talking with you all today. I worked with a group of theater folks for the last year, during 2019, to teach them about transformative justice, and we did a yearlong introductory training.

SK: Why did you say yes?

MIA: I said yes because I think we need this everywhere. My specific passion is ending child sexual abuse. But I also am passionate about ending all forms of sexual and domestic violence, and I know how bound up all forms of violence are to each other. And I think also because I come out of communities that can't rely on the state and I can't call the police. So, I just feel like this work needs to happen everywhere. And so, I was just also really excited that any institution wants to put money and like institutional backing behind this work. And I think for people like me who have been doing this work for so long unpaid, and for so long trying to kind of always make the argument for TJ. And now we're in a different world where people are hungry for this work which feels like such a blessing in some ways, but also scary and like, what is going on in other ways, because people are coopting it and also saying they're doing TJ, but it's not TJ. And that was also a reason to say yes. And also, I think for me, because it's part of the local Bay Area community, you're part of my community. I don't want any harm to happen in the community that I'm in. I mean, I don't want it to happen in any community, but especially the communities that I live in and the places where I am because that impacts everybody. So yeah, I felt really excited to do it. And they promised me food at everything. I didn't know really anything about the theater world and the theater community. And thank goodness for the group of folks that I worked with who helped to give me some information. And you know, every now and then, it'd be like, what does that word mean again? What is that term? Please tell me again, I forgot. But yeah, I was really struck by how intimate theater is, and yet there's very little thought put into, well what happens if those boundaries get crossed? Or what happens if things go awry, because it seems so ripe for things to go awry? And I was surprised at that, thinking of scenes where you're working, like you're saying, like people using their bodies and being even in like physical close

proximity but also emotional proximity with each other. And that it's all such a small community at the same time. Even in big cities it's a small community.

SK: Yeah.

MIA: Theater community feels like a weird, big, extended family. That was something I learned. It's like wow, all these people have connections in these different ways. I did not realize just how small it is. And in some ways, because the theater community is so small, it's so applicable. And you know, I work with so many, in particular like oppressed communities, where they're also very small. We can't afford to just throw each other away. And so, what do we do in these small communities? We have to start working on our skill sets around accountability and repair and making amends and healing relationships and ourselves. Because, I mean, just think about how many good people leave the theater world every year because we don't have these basic skills around small things but also leave around big things. That, because we can't handle the small things between us, then how are we gonna handle the big things? And if we can handle the small things, it helps to prevent the big things, too. It's not a coincidence that we are in a crisis around the climate, and we are in a crisis around mass incarceration and just general harm. Like for example, if you think about any form of like intimate and sexual violence, all of them are at epidemic levels. Like the rates are through the roof, right? The rates are like one in four girls, one in six boys, an average of one and ten children. The rates are like every nine seconds, every 14 seconds, one in three on college campuses. And then when you add on like mass incarceration and police brutality and things like that, like I just feel like it's not a coincidence that we're in this moment of really reckoning with punishment and punitive measures for dealing with harm. The culture of disposability that we've created for ourselves, both in a material way, as well as in a relational way, that we use a cup once and we throw it away. And then we use people once and we throw them away, that all of our relationships in this kind of western capitalist society, I feel like we all have this deep fear that we live with that I could be replaced at any moment, I could be disposed of by this person at any moment, even our closest people. And I think that that culture of disposability has, it's wreaked so much havoc on our world and our lands, but also like our hearts and our souls and our bodies. That is one of the big differences with transformative justice and other types of collective responses to violence, is that we look at the systematic and systemic conditions that we live in, like white supremacy, like poverty, like gentrification, you know, etc., etc. Like patriarchy, like generational cycles of trauma. It's not to say that everybody who experiences harm will do harm or cause harm. But it is to say that we have cycles of violence and trauma for a reason, and they repeat themselves for a reason. That's not anything new. And it is to say that if we can teach people and young people different ways of being and teach them about consent, teach them that they should listen to their bodies and value their emotions and share their heart more, like all of these things, and teach them about taking accountability, and teach them that there's other ways of dealing with harm or hurt even that don't have to look like punitive ways or revenge or ways that are about domination, we can start to shift things. Honestly, I feel like this is the thing about harm and violence and abuses, that it cuts across all our communities. And no matter what community I'm working, it seems most of them have never talked about it, they have never had any real work or

conversation done around it. They're all kind of flying by the seat of their pants, if not, most of them are just ignoring it and not doing anything about it or sweeping things under the rug. In many ways it was really nice to work with the theater community on this because they were putting institutional backing behind wanting to actually have something done about this and to actually learn about it in a realistic way. And meaning that it wasn't just a Band-Aid on something or like, we'll just fix everything, and we'll have this one amazing event or training, and then everything will be done. I mean granted, I had to pull them back a little bit, because in the beginning I think, like many communities, you know, are thinking that it's gonna be a lot easier than it actually is. And it ain't just like any work you're in. You need to study your craft. You need to read. You need to learn and gain a depth of knowledge as well. And you need to practice. Just like theater, you're not gonna begin as somebody who's never directed a play before and just walk in and do everything right. You have to work your way up and practice and study and learn the names of folks who have come before you, and their work. And the same is true with responding to violence, harm, and abuse, which is why we're so terrible at it as a society. Because we don't invest any time in it. Time and capacity are always a big challenge. And you know, we only met eight times throughout of the year. But even still, trying to get people who could meet all of those eight times, and times where everybody could meet at once, the entire group, was really, really hard, and hopefully gave a small glimpse into transformative justice which is also hard to schedule. I mean, like yeah, there's the politic around it. There's the work any everything. But also, just the capacity. And then most of us live lives where our days and our nights are so full that we can't squeeze anything else into it. And if we think about, you know, if we're gonna respond to any type of harm or violence, we're going to need time to do that. And I think there's real ways that capitalism and the culture that we live in set us up to not have any time to build relationships, not have any time to take care of ourselves, to not have any time to do the type of practice work that I'm talking about. And both and, there's also ways that we spend the time we do have not doing those things. So, I think it's both the conditions we live in and our choices. I really want the theater world to be able to do this well, because I feel like, similar to the way I feel of social justice work, I feel like it undermines your work if you're not able to respond well to this. Because who cares if you can like put on a great production if people were like, I came forward about sexual misconduct and nothing happened? Or I came forward about racism and white supremacy and sexism and nothing happened, you know. Then like, what does it matter? And then at whose expense are we putting on this great art for? And like literally getting pleasure at the expense of other people. And also, theater is so emotional, but it's like we only want people's emotions on the stage, otherwise please don't bring them to us.

SK: Thinking back on the year, what growth did you observe happening in the group or any changes that you saw?

MIA: I loved getting to witness people's arc of transformation, I guess, and growth in themselves around getting clear on like even what the work is. Because I think even in the beginning, people were kind of like, I don't know, what the work? Like, unless we're calling somebody out, I

don't know what the work is. And it's like, woah, that's not – yeah, like there's so much work to do.

SK: Mmhm.

MIA: I do think that there were probably people in the cohort who were like, you know, I'm ready. Just tell me what to do and then I'll do it by the end of the year, then I'll be done. And it's like, no, this is lifelong work. And I don't know how many other ways I can say that and like to really get people to understand. You know, I think it's very similar to how we think of like approaching oppression in our work, right? Like diversity, quote-unquote, things, you know. We'll just have this diversity training and then after it's done, we'll all be totally good, and everything will be great. And you know, but it's like, no, this is lifelong work, you know? And it's not enough just to have a sexual harassment training, for example. Like this is about shifting the entire culture. I remember when I came into this work over 15 years ago, like realizing like, wow, I need to do a lot of work on myself in order to be able to do this work. And that feeling really big but also like clear in a way, you know, that I don't think – when I first, first entered the work, I don't think I got that at all. And it took like a good couple years in to be like right, right. I imagine that for a lot of people in that room, they hadn't had that time necessarily to actually get to spend with each other and weren't actively encouraged to get to know each other on a deeper level. Like, not just a level of like, hey, how you doing? How was your weekend? You know, as you're like changing costumes or whatever, but more like, hi, what do you need to take accountability for this month or since we've last seen you? How are you doing, working on your own healing? You know, I think a big part of transformative justice is, if we're not gonna use these other institutions that we know are harmful, like the police or prisons or the court systems or foster care systems or ICE, then that means that we are the people who have to respond. And so, I think that it was really beautiful and magnificent to get to see people coming into that reality. So, one, thinking through in their life, what the fuck would I do if something happened to me? Or something happened to somebody that I love? Or somebody that I loved and cared about did something to somebody else? What would I do and who would I call? And then also, people starting to look to each other in the training as a cohort and thinking, yeah, we would probably be the people in the theater community right now at least who we would call on, because nobody else has been through this TJ training. And I think that starting to feel the weight of that responsibility, which I think is a gift, but also letting the fog kind of lift, coming into clear focus around like, yeah, what would I do?

TIERRA: So, who were these 27 not-totally-strangers, who volunteered for eight, eight-hour workshops? And what happened when we generally kept being polite and started getting real?

Clip from The Real World: "This is the true story - true story - of seven strangers, picked to live in a loft"

TIERRA: I'm sorry . I just had to do one reference. If you know, you know. So, we were majority people of color, and even more majority cis women and trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming folks. Extra shout out to the SEED group of core organizers who were majority Black women. We had queer folks and disabled folks. We had folks at different stages of our careers, most of us between our 20s and 40s. We played a variety of roles in theater. There were actors, directors, designers, playwrights, dramaturgs, folks in production, education, casting, and community engagement, a journalist. We had very few folks in upper leadership. One managing director and one artistic director. Out of 27 folks who committed, we only had two cis men. Overall, folks in the room came from communities navigating sometimes multiple intersecting frontlines of systemic and interpersonal violence.

RADHIKA: Hi my name is Radhika Rhao; and I'm a member of the Theater Bay Area community. I feel like I had a year and half where I experienced a lot of harm or maybe harm was done before that as well, but I think I just woke up to it, and it happened in different context where I began to see it as a systemic issue. And then finally, it took on a big form when the #MeToo movement started and even within our theater community in San Francisco. We had a few incidents that had to do with harm on different scales. So, my story started to intersect with what was happening in the Bay Area, with individuals as well as organizations, and it finally culminated in a Town Hall, you know, that I was fortunate to help in organizing. And out of that Town Hall came the realization that, you know, we just needed to take some action. I had actually three different sets of harm. One particular incidence where I think we were doing intimate work, specifically doing kissing where like it actually physically really impacted me because I broke into hives. And the director just had no sense of the fact that this was harmful, you know. I don't do the psychological harm that's done when two people are really brought in together in intimate circumstances and there's no cooldown from that. The other incident was around a particular artistic director who really, in my mind, abused their power, and just made remarks of a sexual nature and actions which was very, very humiliating. And a lewd comment was made about my clothing right during a fight sequence, and I couldn't do anything in that moment. Looking back now, I would have said something, but I literally had the freeze response. And the third incident was around just being bullied, you know, by an older actor who's a member of the union and I wasn't. You know, in all three incidences, I think it was race, age, gender, union status or not, that came in. This working group that started on transformative justice really gave me that forum to stand on because this is not isolated, it's actually really systemic.

VALERIE: My name is Valerie Weak; I am an actor and teaching artist in the San Francisco Bay Area. I heard about the yearlong initiative after volunteering to help put together the Times Up Town Hall, co-led or co-sponsored by a variety of Bay Area Theater organizations. That was where I first really heard even what transformative justice and restorative justice were, as that was being put together. I wanted to dive into the transformative justice training because a variety of reasons. One of the reasons had to do with the fact that I had been working in the Bay Area theater community to advocate for greater representation, greater work opportunities for

women and non-binary people, and starting to see sort of systemically what some of the problems and issues were that were keeping women and nonbinary folks from doing the work. Some of those were related to harm being caused or harm that was happening within the community.

NIKKI: My name is Nikki Anderson Joy; my pronouns are she/her/hers, and I'm a Costume Designer in the Bay Area. One of the former core leaders, she and I had lunch, and I was telling her about a previous situation that I had with someone in the Bay Area. And she was like, Nikki, you need to do this. And she then emailed SK and told them, and they were like, we're having this, you know, one workshop, eight hours. Come. And then from that, I was like, oh, I need to do this. I think it deals more with the personal situation, the personal story that I have. And so, it's more of finding an answer to like what I want to do.

LEONTYNE: My name is Leontyne. There was sort of a manifestation of the #MeToo type incident at the theater that I worked at and in the show I was in, and that I sort of missed, I didn't see it in real time per se. And so, I wanted to educate myself about how I could learn to see it, how I could respond when it was brought to me, and how to deal with the people involved, both the people who have perpetrated harm and the harmers in order for the most productive healing to happen.

J: My name is J Jha; I go by all pronouns. I am an actor, an immigrant, a refugee in the Bay Area. I have told stories since 2014 in the Bay, which is when I moved here. And because of the intersectionality of my life, being trans, being immigrant, and refugee, I'm constantly looking for ways to bring that in my art. I worked at Theater Bay Area when Cal Shakes approached TBA to figure out if we would send people over for TJ. And it intersected with the work that we were doing on diversity, equity, and inclusion in our own company, which is a white-led organization led by white people for about 17 years now. Then TJ comes up, and therefore the management thought it appropriate to send mid-level management to this workshop. It was important for me as an immigrant to really start looking at where home is and then what do I do for making that home really home for everyone. It has been a constant problem for me, this idea, that there is no other solution to our problems, living in a community, than calling the cops. Because that has never solved problems, especially for people who looked like me.

RAY: Hello my name is Ray; I use she and they pronouns. I knew that I wanted to part in the daylong, but when I got an email about the yearlong process, I actually wanted to make sure that it was okay to participate for personal reasons, not just to use this process for the Bay Area Theater community. I know that I'm in multiple communities where there has been harm caused and people are addressing it, and sometimes it hasn't gone well. So, I really just wanted to gain some skills and some insight around that. I mean, I think the thing is that harm is caused in every community, and I think in some spaces I have been in there is a process to deal with that. And sometimes I think there's a great process. Sometimes I think there's a process that is really flawed, and sometimes there's no process, and no language, and no accountability around it.

JAMILA: I'm Jamila Cobham; pronouns are she/her/hers. I work at California Shakespeare Theatre as the Production Manager. There're so many issues that come up; sexual harassment, racism, policing in general. And it feels like we've been using the same system for a long time of punishment, and it isn't working. So, when we started to learn more about what transformative justice is, I was like, yeah, I would be interested in learning more about it to just figure out if I even believe in it. At first, I was like, I don't know how to do this training as well as do my work at Cal Shakes, 'cuz taking a day away felt like a lot. But also, I just felt as though sometimes you work with artists, art designers, or directors who do things that are inappropriate. And the answer is always, okay, let's never work with them again, not talk to them, which was problematic, and just don't hire them. But then that behavior will continue somewhere else. And that didn't feel like the right thing to do. So, it was like, okay, is there a way that whatever this is can like help us in the future?

SARAH: My name is Sarah Williams; I am the Managing Director at the California Shakespeare Theater, also known as Cal Shakes, here in the Bay Area. The reason it was interesting to me is that I wanted to understand other ways of thinking about harm being done, how you address it, and how to move beyond it and through it. And I think because all this information about harm and violence in the theater community was coming out in a way that was like very big national news, and thinking about some of the artists involved who are like incredibly well-respected artists, and, for myself, not knowing how to hold both of those things at the same time. And so, what was interesting and so compelling about the TJ work is it felt like it would give me a way into wrestling with that, wrestling with like holding more than one thing, being true at once, and also like a way of actually addressing something that doesn't just send someone out of the community forever and ever, and like places like this one judgment on them that doesn't take into account someone's whole self. The other part that was really interesting to me was, as someone who now runs an organization, being able to see if there was a way that the principles and practices of transformative justice could be incorporated into how you run an organization and how you treat your employees and how you build a community, and because the way we run organizations now are so corporate, and it feels so cold and sterile. And as a theater company, we're just so much more than that, in terms of the humanity and emotions that come with being in an artistic, creative realm all the time. And that always felt like there was tension to me. And so, I was like, maybe TJ could be a way of thinking about all of that differently.

CLIVE: My name is Clive Worsley; I use he/him/his pronouns, and I and the Director of Artistic Learning at the California Shakespeare Theatre. Well, when I first became aware that this intensive was going to happen, it occurred to me that if we were going to have conversations and explorations about a 360-degree transformative justice process, wherein the people who cause harm are as involved as the people who have been harmed, that it was important that, um – because historically the majority of the people who caused these kind of harms look like me and share my identity. It felt important to me that that identity be represented in the room, white, cis-gendered, straight male.

ERIC: My name is Eric Ting; I am the Artistic Director of California Shakespeare Theater. There was a real sense that something needed to happen, and that that one event was not enough. And there was a lot of conversation about what would it take to be able to turn this moment into something that could have a meaningful consequence for our community. And I think that's where it came up. It became very clear that this would be a really amazing opportunity to do some focused work around this transformative justice conversation. I definitely believe, for this work to have lasting impact, it has to involve people from all corners of the organization, because it so often is simply the expectation that members of the staff, often junior members of the staff, are the ones that are bringing this work into these legacy white organizations and trying to make a case for it, whether it's EDI work, whether it's anti-racist, anti-bias training, and whether it's this vision of transformative justice. Even when you look around at the circle of participants that came out, I think that also definitely revealed itself to be true. And you and I had a conversation about this, about whether or not I'd be able to commit the time to this and how valuable it would be to have actually someone in a leadership position, like an artistic director position, participating in these workshops. And what ended up happening was, for me, the TJ work stitched together. All of the very disparate conversations that I felt like I'd been having internally since I arrived here. And it turned that work into a way for me personally to cope with what I can only describe as a personal loss, of what happened with Gordon and the profile that happened in the New York Times, and just kind of wrestling with, to be frank, wrestling with my own complicity in it.

Music Break

TIERRA: I want to take a moment to honor those in my community who actively work against racism, sexism, and other oppression in Bay Area Theater, who attended the Town Hall and maybe even one of the Transformative Justice 101 Workshops and opted not to commit to the yearlong cohort. This project is not to minimize or dismiss other principled ways that folks are responding to harm, violence, and abuse. Personally, I'm not sure TJ is best suited for dealing with folks causing harm who want to hold onto power and the status quo more than they want to make things right. That is, folks who aren't opened to being transformed. SK recalled that differences in strategy came up even among theater practitioners organizing the It's Time Town Hall on Sexual Harassment in Bay Area Theater.

SK: We had a TJ facilitator in the Bay, Adrienne Sky Roberts, come and sort of try to start explaining to us what transformative justice is. There was a lot of pushback. I don't know if you all remember that people in those meetings got upset. There was like, what are you trying to make us do? I don't understand this, right, which is this theme that we, at least I've been experiencing over and over and witness to, where it's like, once you kind of crack the door of TJ, there's no real sound byte, there's no easy way of understanding it. There's just like eight more doors, right, and then you like go through. And it's just actually – yeah, it's like deep, deep people work.

TIERRA: So next episode we will be diving deep into what is transformative justice, and the three episodes after that will all unpack it further. I agree with SK that it's tricky to sum up TJ in a sound byte. But we asked our cohort members to try.

LEONTYNE: Transformative justice is the concept of taking a situation where harm has occurred and fundamentally transforming the way that people think about what they can do about that harm and healing the effect of it in order to ensure that it never happens again, in order to change the way that people think, in order to change what it is that that allowed for that harm to happen.

RAY: To me transformative justice is a framework where we are trying to address harm and reduce harm and change the conditions so we can transform the world into a place where less harm is caused and where we don't have to rely on state systems that actually perpetuate a whole lot of harm and violence for most of us.

RADHIKA: As opposed to a justice system that we currently have that's predominant in most parts of the world that's based on rewards and punishments, that transformative justice is really about transformation of society, transformation of individuals, the victims as well as the perpetrators, that everybody gets transformed. Transformative justice is all of us taking responsibility for our community instead of saying that that harm is outside myself. You know, how do you deal with that, that thing that's uncomfortable, that's yours?

TIERRA: Y'all, we made it to the end of the Episode 1 of The Real Work: A Podcast About Theater Culture and Transformative Justice. And I've got a take-home exercise for you, if you'd like. Either solo or with the folks you're tuning in to this podcast with, take some time to reflect and check in. How did listening to this episode go for you? How did your body, your mind, your spirit respond? Is there anything you notice about these responses, any patterns? Were these responses consistent? Did they change? As I have said before, we want you to be well on this journey with us, so especially if you notice that engaging with the series so far has been challenging for you in any way, or if you imagine that could happen, consider if making a trigger plan could serve you. That is, take time to anticipate if there are references or scenarios that could come up through the rest of this audio series that may trigger you. Once you've done that, take time to plan for how you could care for yourself if you do end up experiencing those triggers, so that you can be well, and, at a pace that's right for you, you can keep engaging with the series. Self-care for triggers is not one-size-fits-all, and I want to lift up some more accessible strategies that some folks find really supportive in certain cases. A person might pause or fast forward through a part of an episode. They might move their body in a way that brings them joy, whether that's doing some stretching, taking a walk, getting some vigorous exercise in. They might drink some water or take a shower or a bath if hydrotherapy is their jam. They might take some nourishing deep breaths. They might play a music playlist of songs that work to get them in a really good mood. Maybe you'll want to write down your trigger plan. Maybe you'll want to talk it out in a voice note to yourself. Maybe you'll just want to clear some

mental space and really think it through. Especially if you have experiences of surviving violence, you are encouraged to take exquisite care of yourself. That's part of the real work, for sure. And I want to say a deep thank you to Anjali Nath Upadhyay, founder of the adult grassroots freedom school project, Liberation Spring, for teaching this exercise to me. Thank you for listening to The Real Work: A Podcast About Theater Culture and Transformative Justice. Please check out the show notes for the transcript and for plenty of links and resources to tide you over 'til the next episode drops. And please consider sharing this work with your communities. Thank you to the Center for Cultural Innovation's Investing in Artists Grant, the City of Oakland's Cultural Funding Program, and to Cal Shakes for initially incubating this project. Our theme music is by zAnda of DiaspoRADiCAL. This is a collaboration with We Rise Production, and we'd love to hear from you. Connect with us at weriseproduction@pm.me, on the socials, and at weriseproduction.com. Do we want to close with a collective breath?

SK: Sure.

Breath

TIERRA: Alright, that's a wrap.