

WISE CHILDREN'S LOCKDOWN

TEA & BISCUITS — MARC ANTOLIN

Emma:

Hello. I'm Emma Rice, the Artistic Director of Wise Children and you're listening to Wise Children's Lockdown. Our lockdown project is about us finding ways of staying close to each other. On this show, I call up an old friend, play some records, and most importantly, get to chat and reminisce. Come and join us for tea and biscuits.

Emma:

Hello and welcome to Wise Children's Lockdown Tea and Biscuits. This is our first episode and this is a chance for me to chat to some of my friends, because I'm missing them all so much. I wanted the most biddable, wonderful, charming friend to start off the series, which is Mr. Marc Antolin. Welcome.

Mark:

Hello. Thank you.

Emma:

Hi, there, Marc.

Mark:

What biscuit have you got?

Emma:

I have got a classic rich tea biscuit. What biscuit have you got?

Mark:

I've got a Welsh cake.

Emma:

Oh, no. They're too stodgy.

Mark:

Oh, homemade though.

Emma:

Katie Owen always brings a Welsh cake and I have to say, they stick to the mouth like no other substance.

Mark:

You've got to have it with a cup of tea.

Emma:

You have. Where are you?

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Mark:

I'm in my back garden.

Emma:

Where is your garden?

Mark:

In Wales.

Emma:

Wales. Paint me a picture. What can you see?

Mark:

I can see some trees. I can see the garden wall, and I can hear one or two cars passing because it's very quiet.

Emma:

How's it going? How's your lockdown so far?

Mark:

It's all right. It's weird, isn't it? We should be in Washington, DC right now, but I'm sitting in my garden in Port Talbot sort of slightly anxious about the future. I think everyone's in that position, so there's nothing really we can do about it. I'm just trying to enjoy the downtime as much as I can.

Emma:

It's weird, isn't it because all of us in theatre, we're hardwired to not consider it to be downtime. We think of it as being out of work or available, depending on whether you're feeling positive. This enforced downtime, it's unlike any other moment.

Mark:

Yeah, and normally when you get this as an actor, you're looking for the next job or wondering what the next job is or looking for auditions and things, but obviously, none of that is happening. So for the first time in 12 years, I'm sort of trying to take a break in this forced downtime.

Emma:

It's hard though, isn't it?

Mark:

It's really hard because you think you should be using the time to be really productive, which I am doing. I am doing things, but then also I am just trying to have a rest as well, which is well needed.

Emma:

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Well, yeah. And also, theatre's are collaborative activity, isn't it? It's really hard to work by yourself when you're a theatre maker.

Mark:

Yeah, and I've sort of had all these ideas of things I've wanted to make and write and devise and workshop, but it's really hard sitting in front of a laptop doing that when I'm not used to doing it that way, especially-

Emma:

You're a theatre animal. You shouldn't be in front of a laptop.

Mark:

No, I know. I need to have a silly hat on and dance around the room as I've been. Maybe I'll do that.

Emma:

Yeah, ain't that the truth?

Mark:

Yeah.

Emma:

Before we get onto some music, right at the beginning you said, "I should have been in Washington." It caught me by surprise actually, because I've almost forgotten what should have been happening. Are you marking time with where you should have been? Are you still thinking about that?

Mark:

A little bit. Yeah. Yeah, I guess I am because I'm looking ... I don't know why I'm looking at my diary, but you see things that you should have been doing. Like, I know that a few days ago, I should have been going from New York to Washington DC and opening nights and things. You etch those dates in your head for a bit and now, there's no other dates to etch in your head for a long time. So you still got those potential plans or plans that were happening in your head.

Emma:

That's breaking my heart, Marc.

Mark:

No, I'm sorry. I didn't do that.

Emma:

That's all right. It's what tea and biscuit is for, isn't it?

Mark:

Exactly.

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Emma:

For those of you that don't know Marc is in my beautiful show Romantics Anonymous, which should have been moving from LA, Beverly Hills to Washington DC at this moment, and it didn't either. So a bit heartbreaking. I was opposite, I cleared my diary. I took everything out because I thought this is going to break my heart. I think I did something a bit different to try and reclaim this time as something a bit different.

Emma:

Anyway, I'm going to start talking about the past a bit because the future is too difficult. Marc Antolin, I've just done a little bit of googling and we met in 2016. I have to say I was a bit surprised at how recent it is. I feel like I've known you longer.

Mark:

I feel so ... That is weird. 2016 I thought it was a long time ago.

Emma:

I know.

Mark:

Yeah, but then I guess we've crammed a lot in four years, haven't we?

Emma:

We have. So I would like to talk a little bit about the first moment we met.

Mark:

Okay. I think I had a moustache.

Emma:

So, I'll give my context. I think you did have a moustache. So I met Marc when I was auditioning, when I was working for Kneehigh Theatre, and I was auditioning for The Flying Lovers of Vitebsk, the show about Marc Chagall. I was looking for my Marc Chagall, and I wanted somebody who could sing and could move and could act, and looks a little bit like Marc Chagall. So it was quite a tight brief, can I say? I like the [crosstalk 00:05:49] tight brief. In fact, we could get into that later because ...

Mark:

I love a tight brief.

Emma:

He does, and you've sported some marvellous tight briefs in our relationship. Anyway, before we get on to Twelfth Night, so I was auditioning, and I'll never forget that day of auditions. Because I saw so many people. I saw so many people and I feel I saw some amazing people. So if they happen to be listening, you were marvellous, but you were the first person through the door, Marc. And you just smashed it. I just fell in love with you, because casting is a bit like blind dating. Somebody walks in and you see whether you like them, and you were just fantastic and funny and brilliant.

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Emma:

You sang a beautiful song. I can remember thinking, oh my God, he's my Marc Chagall. There he is. And then I had to see these poor other sort of 26 lovely chaps, and all through the day I was going, I want the first one. I want the first one. So that was what it was like from my point of view. What was it like from yours?

Mark:

So I'd built this audition up for such a long time, because I'd known like two weeks before. I think it was just after Christmas the audition, so I had all of Christmas thinking about this audition. I mean, I'd seen *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, which you had directed. I think that must have been about eight years before that maybe or something.

Emma:

That makes me about 65 I think. Maybe three years. I don't know.

Mark:

Lockdown feels like a really long time to me.

Emma:

I know. I'm really antsy.

Mark:

Yeah, but I mean, I remember seeing that show and I was just bowled away by it and sort of all the theatrics involved in it and how you told the story through movement and song and dance. I'd waited to audition for you for a very long time. So this was really amazing when I got this audition through. I remember going he spells Marc with a C, I'm Marc with a C. This is meant to be. I just did so much work on what we had to do for the audition and I was so nervous because I knew I was the first one in.

Mark:

So you do those things where you wake up at like six o'clock in the morning and do a vocal warmup and go through the lines, then you arrive an hour early. I remember it was one of those auditions where you had to sign yourself in so I could see the list of people that were going in. I just remember going, "Oh, they're going to get it. Oh, they're good. They're brilliant. They'll get it. They'll get it."

Mark:

I thought, right, just go in and smash the audition. Yeah, I just remember having such a laugh in the room. I had that dry mouth thing, do you know, where your lip sticks to your teeth a little bit, at first, and I was like, oh, just shake it off, shake it off. I just remember you sort of making me play around with one of the monologues and sort of be a bit silly, which I managed to do, because that comes naturally in a way. Yeah, and I just remember having the best time. And then as I was leaving, I had a little fanboy moment and I was like, "Oh my God, Emma. I just want to tell you, I saw your show about eight years ago, about three years ago ..."

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Emma:

50.

Mark:

50 years ago I saw your show. I had my little fanboy moment. As I was just about to leave the room, you said, "Oh Marc, by the way, we've seen you sing and we've seen you ... But can you dance?" I think I threw my bag on the floor and did a really silly contemporary dance by the door. As I left, I went, "Oh my God, why did I do that?" Everything was going so well. And now in hindsight, that silly dance probably got the job.

Emma:

You didn't put a foot wrong. Every bit of it was brilliant. Isn't it funny after all these years I can remember it so clearly. And here we are, old friends years later. It's brilliant.

Mark:

Yeah, you're making me cry now.

Emma:

Well, I'm going to continue that with your first record choice. Tell me about it.

Mark:

So this is the song that I sang for my audition, I think. Is that right?

Emma:

Yeah. I haven't told you this. Yes.

Mark:

So yeah, so this is the song I sang for my audition for The Flying Lovers of Vitebsk. Because I remember you asking for a world song or something that was sort of not British and other worldly. So I decided to sing a Welsh folk song which is one of my favourite songs. This version is sung by Ryan Davies who was a comedian and part of a double act in Wales called Ryan and Ronnie. Yeah, this is called Myfanwy.

MUSIC – Myfanwy

Emma:

Oh, that was so beautiful. The Welsh voice, aye.

Mark:

It's a special thing.

Emma:

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It is and you've got it. So I'm going to fast forward to that show Flying Lovers of Vitebsk, which was so special, wasn't it?

Mark:

Yeah.

Emma:

I love it with all my heart and it was such a magic time making it, and you and Audrey Brisson who made it with me and Ian Ross and James Gow. It was such a tiny show with so much art and so much history. It was written by Daniel Jamieson. There's a long story because actually, Dan and I were together a long time ago, and he wrote the show for us and we performed it. So this show is so deep in my DNA, and it was so special to come back to it as a director and as an older person and watch it just flower with you and Audrey into a much better life than it ever was when me and Dan did it.

Emma:

But I wanted to play a little bit of the Tchaikovsky, the Tchaikovsky piano trio, which is woven throughout the piece. We had it when me and Dan did it a lifetime ago in 1990, or something, it went through it and we loved it. We loved the feel of the Russian feel, is played by Jewish musicians. We felt that there was a whole load of history in this and I'm going to play it because we're going to talk about the song, the way that the music evolved and your musicality in it. So let's have a little bit of Tchaikovsky. (singing)

Emma:

I don't think I can ever listen to that without wanting to cry.

Mark:

I haven't heard that version for a long time as well. It's so grand and so beautiful, isn't it?

Emma:

Oh, it was such a special show. Talk to me a little bit about the process and the form because it was the first time we worked together.

Mark:

Yeah, I mean, it was the first time I'd worked on the devised show like that as well in my professional career. I just remember loving every minute of it because we didn't realize we were ever rehearsing anything because it was just always sort of tasks and sort of devising sequences of movement based on a theme or learning a song based on a theme and playing games, essentially, and making this show that we'd had this script to and slotting things in to make a show.

Mark:

I remember after the two weeks, we were like, oh, let's run it. And without realizing we had about 75% of the show, and I remember going, how did that happen? Because it felt like we were just playing games and singing songs with people for a week and a half. Yeah, I mean, it was just that there was so much detail and research into it as well. It makes it all the more special I think when

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you put so much of yourself into it, which was really lovely. I just had the best time. I just remember going this is how I want to work the rest of my career really.

Emma:

My memory is sort of how intimate it was. I think it was an amazing group of people and we had Etta Murfitt working with the choreography with you and Audrey and the immediate intimacy that came from your musicality and your physicality. And then we were exploring all the different ways of representing painting. I mean, that's what I remember. It's just the electricity in the room and like you say, we worked so fast. I mean, I like to surprise people with how much work you're quietly making without getting too intense about it. But we made it so fast, didn't we?

Mark:

Yeah, it was just mad and it was such an intense process. But the most fun process as well.

Emma:

I'm going to talk about there was one bit of it, which I remember as being like one of the most sort of heady, creative moments of my career. I think Dan realized that we were missing a sort of moment of love, of mature love between Marc and Bella. At the same moment, Ian Ross, the composer was trying to work through how Tchaikovsky was working into a more contemporary voice, his natural voice.

Emma:

And then Dan found this poem by Rachel Korn, which was actually written in Yiddish, which we got translated and we set it to music. We've got a recording of you singing it. This will really set me off now. You'll hear Marc Antolin singing this song, No One Knows It, with Audrey Brisson singing and you'll hear Ian Ross's music fusing into Tchaikovsky. I honestly think this is one of the most beautiful sort of three minutes of theatre and music that I've ever made. (singing)

MUSIC – Flying Lovers of Vitebsk – No-One Knows It.

Emma:

Boom. That is love and history, and oh my gosh.

Mark:

That's wonderful, isn't it?

Emma:

It is really wonderful. I want to do it again.

Mark:

Yes. Well, we got time.

Emma:

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We do it virtually, I could roll around as if I'm Bella.

Mark:

I reckon so.

Emma:

That's a sight nobody wants to see. Moving on. Oh, no, no moving on.

Mark:

Oh, no.

Emma:

Your second choice, you know what you're going to do now.

Mark:

Oh, yeah.

Emma:

I have an expression in rehearsals when I say something strong but wrong, which is sort of rewarding a big idea. That's actually a terrible idea. I have some really bad ideas. So Marc, would you like to describe this bad idea that never made it onto stage?

Mark:

So, this was when I think this is the first time we were about to do the show. It was during just before we went into tech, and the show was sort of 90 minutes, and it was very intense, and the ending was incredibly emotional and sad. I remember you going, "I can't leave the audience going out sad after a show. I really want to give them something else to send them on their way sort of in an uplifting mood rather than really sad."

Mark:

So then we decided to look up what was number one in the charts in France when Marc Chagall died. He saw so many historical events in his life and he sort of lived for a very long time through very different periods of history. We found out that the number one in France when he died was the Ghostbusters theme. We were like, okay, well, there's nothing in that, is there? Emma went, "No, no, that's perfect." Because it's fun and people all know it. And it just shows how much Marc Chagall lived through.

Mark:

So I was like, "Are you crazy?" You were deadly serious. I remember we were all giving side eyes to each other on the table going, this can't be serious. I was waiting for you to laugh and go, "No, I'm only joking." But no, you were deadly serious. You even said to Ian Ross, "Can you come up with a Klezmer version of the Ghostbusters theme song?" I was just like, this is crazy. We did try it I think. There was even one point when we were sort of going, who are you going to call, Marc Chagall. We

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were like, this is not going to work. I think it was like one of the only times where I've kind of gone, "Emma, I don't think you're right on this decision. I think we should sing something else."

Emma:

Those ideas you sometimes have to go with them because if they work, they're brilliant, but it was awful. The bit of context was we had played the song from 1946 I think it was, which was number one when Bella Chagall died and I thought it'd be fun to show how long. Because it was 1989 when Marc Chagall died. I thought it would be great to show what a long life he'd had, but it was a terrible idea.

Mark:

Awful.

Emma:

It did happen. I think we did rehearse a Klezmer version. But in honor of strong but wrong, well, who are you going to call? Ghostbusters.

Mark:

Ghostbusters.

Music – Ray Parker Jnr - Ghostbusters

Emma:

You've got to try these things.

Mark:

You've got to. Oh my word. We did try it, and then-

Emma:

What terrible lapse of judgment. I'm going to skip Twelfth Night because I'm going to come to that at the end. But talk to me a little bit about Romantics Anonymous and playing Jean-René which is the show you should be doing at this very minute.

Mark:

Yeah. I mean, when we first did this show, it sort of crept up on us all and we had this really short run in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. There was so much love in the show. I remember it was sort of a really funny time in the world, and we just made this lovely, beautiful show that everyone who saw it fell in love with it and everyone who didn't see it was sort of like oh my God, I'm so sad I missed that show. Please bring it ... I can't speak. Please bring it back. Two years later, we brought it back. Yeah, we should be doing it now. But yeah, I mean, it's one of my favourite shows and I know everyone who's seen it says the same thing.

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Emma:

I'm a bit taken aback. I've gone quiet because you said that everything was going weird in the world, and it was. I often forget that, that it was 2018. It was the last show I made at the Globe. We were in the wake of Brexit, weren't we?

Mark:

Yeah.

Emma:

There had been the terrorist attacks on London Bridge, the first, the Borough Market. It felt like the world was really unstable and personally, it had been such a difficult time for me. I can remember at the time of deciding to do Romantics Anonymous thinking, oh, there's kind of only two routes here. Which is, upset, and which is the route to anger and bitterness, which was something I really didn't want in my life, or sort of love. I can remember thinking, come on, Emma, just do something that's so full of love that you sort of defy the odds. We did, didn't we? That's my memory of it, is it really was a bubble.

Mark:

It was such a joy coming into work for that whole time that we were doing the show. Yeah, it was a really magical show with a lovely group of people, and I'm so glad that we did bring it back and hopefully, we will get to do that again, because it was sort of an injustice.

Emma:

I can't even tolerate the idea that it's not going to have another life. It can't. I mean, I don't know, maybe I'm mad and holding on to some life that's passed, but it can't. We've got to be able to tell stories and share.

Mark:

Yeah. I think it's the ...

Emma:

Say that again. I lost you for a bit.

Mark:

That's okay. I think this is the perfect show that people will need after something like this where you just get to go and have fun in a theatre for two and a half ish hours.

Emma:

Yeah. I love the mixture of it's kind of cool and French, isn't it? It's got a bit of sort of Juliette Binoche about it. It's sort of really cool. But it's really British as well. It's got Victoria Wood in there. It's got Dinner ladies, as well as [inaudible 00:31:34]. It just hits all the buttons. It's so magical.

Mark:

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Yeah. There's something so incredibly human about it, and there's something we all see in ourselves in that show. Even though the characters may be slightly heightened, they're so truthful to themselves and it's just very hopeful for the future of that show. Yeah, it makes me happy inside.

Emma:

Here's you singing If She Loved Me.

Music – Romantics Anonymous – If She Loved Me

Emma:

Marc's accepting a round of applause, which is so deserved. Oh, God, I'm sure you will be soon, please.

Mark:

Hopefully, yeah. That's such a lovely ...

Emma:

It's beautiful, isn't it? I can't bear it. I'm going to cheer us up now by thinking about Twelfth Night.

Mark:

And my tight pants, my tight briefs.

Emma:

Marc played Andrew Aguecheek in Twelfth Night, which was my final Shakespeare at the Globe. When I say final, that made it sound like there was loads, out of two. My second and final Shakespeare. I would like you to describe your costume and your look, please.

Mark:

So we set it in 1979, that is right, isn't it?

Emma:

I want to say-

Mark:

1979.

Emma:

Why do I want to say 1978? No, no, no, it was definitely the '70s, wasn't it? '79. Let's go with '79.

Mark:

I'll do that again. Yes, so we set the show in 1979. Because I was sort of not from Scotland, I'd come up to the weekend on a golfing trip. I had these incredibly tight outrageous flares and a pink agile

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knit sweater, and then at some point changed into a very short kilt version of my flares with tiny, tiny [crosstalk 00:36:12]. It was like clueless or something.

Emma:

It was, a Japanese schoolgirl kilt.

Mark:

Yes. At some point that came off and I just ended up in these very tiny, tiny pink pants given to me by Lez Brotherston.

Emma:

Doing let's go dancing. I don't even remember when the kilt came off, I don't remember. I will never, the buttocks [inaudible 00:36:39] in my memory.

Mark:

It was a big reveal from the sleeping bags that we used as trees. We just stepped out of them with no trousers on, because why not?

Emma:

It's broad comedy, isn't it? It works so well at the Globe because it's a body space and it really body humor just works.

Mark:

Completely, and I just remember the whole process of that because the clowns are so hard in Shakespeare and when someone had seen you doing it once, it wasn't funny anymore. So a lot of that process was me panicking going, oh, this doesn't work. No one's getting it. I just remember my first entrance, I slid down the banister and got stuck. I just remember the first time we did that in front of an audience, and there was sort of a really big laugh. I just remember I would go in arcade, this does work and then spending the whole time trying to work out what the audience were getting from it. We had on stage the best time, but also because the audience is so much a part of that show, they were just having the best time.

Mark:

One of my favourite theatre moments actually was when I think it was London Pride, and we did this finale number with semaphore flags. I remember the week before we sort of went, oh, what if we did rainbow flags next week on the Matinee performance? It was really emotional because it was only a slight change. We didn't make a big point of it, we just did this finale number with rainbow flags instead of white flags, and you could just really see the people that that meant something to in the audience and it was a really brilliant moment of just sort of acknowledging the outside world and allowing them in for that afternoon.

Emma:

I was so proud of that moment. It was nothing to do with me, it was the company decided to do it. But I love the Globe with all my heart and always will because it's so democratic. Anybody can walk

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in for five pounds. You don't stand up in the pouring rain or the glaring sun unless you want to have a good time. So the human energy that's held in that theatre is so strong. And then like you say, the plays dammit, they work. They really work. The clowns have to be really funny. They're the hardest thing to rehearse, but the audience just drink it up and the tragedy needs to be really true. But what I feel is that Shakespeare has to be off today. And that's what you did on that Pride day is you made it today in London, on the banks of the Thames and it was so joyful and so profound, it was just brilliant.

Emma:

So, I'm going to say before we play our last song, thank you, Marc Antolin for being the best friend and the most amazing collaborator. You're so creative. You're an absolute dream to have in the rehearsal room and you infect everybody else with your positivity and your genius ideas and your wonderful creative spirit. You do the best pratfalls. You're the funniest person to wear pink knickers and I treasure you very highly and I can't wait for your Jean-René to be shared with the world. Thank you for having tea and biscuits with me.

Mark:

I love you. Thank you so much for having me. It's wonderful. I love working with you. You've changed my life.

Emma:

My tea has gone cold now as my heart bubbles over with the most sweet love.

Mark:

My Welch cake sticking to my mouth.

Emma:

So, this is what Marc was talking about. This is the end of Twelfth Night. We played We Are Family because we are.

Music – Sister Sledge – We Are Family

Emma:

If you have a memory or connection you'd like to share on Tea and Biscuits, leave us a message on our phone line, 0117-318-3846. That's 0117-318-3846. Keep checking our social media for details of our next show. Tea and Biscuits is part of Wise Children's Lockdown. Thanks for hanging out with us. Bye.