

Wise Children's Lockdown

Tea & Biscuits with Emma Rice & Ankur Bahl

Emma Rice:

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 & Biscuits.

Emma Rice:

Hello, and welcome to Wise Children's Lockdown Tea & Biscuits. Today I am talking with my dear friend Ankur Bahl. Hi.

Ankur:

Hi, Emma.

Emma Rice:

The first thing I have to ask you is, what is your virtual or real biscuit of choice today?

Ankur:

I'm eating pistachio.

Emma Rice:

Oh, fancy. I like it.

Ankur:

But with a glass of wine. I've broken all of the rules of Tea & Biscuits to begin with.

Emma Rice:

That looks delicious. Could you describe your large glass of wine to me? What is it?

Ankur:

It's a Gavi. It's [inaudible 00:01:14] and it feels like the right weather to drink white wine.

Emma Rice:

Well, cheers, dear friend.

Ankur:

Cheers to you, my love.

Emma Rice:

How's it going? Tell me about your lockdown. Paint me a picture of where you are and how it's going.

Ankur:

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I am in South East London, in a place called Plumstead, where my partner Wayne and I have just moved into our new home. We moved in just before lockdown. And so we are now spending most of lockdown doing our jobs remotely from wherever it was meant to be from before and slowly tearing the house apart.

Emma Rice:

Oh, fantastic.

Ankur:

What you can't see, for those of you who are listening, I'm sitting in a room where we've stripped all of the walls of wallpaper. So it looks like this boho chic Shoreditch café, but that's not what it's meant to look like. It will look fabulous at some point.

Emma Rice:

You did so well to get in before the lockdown.

Ankur:

So lucky, in a lot of ways, and so lucky to have a really tangible project to work on in this time.

Emma Rice:

Yeah, scraping wallpaper. You can just blitz it, can't you?

Ankur:

And unveiling brick fireplaces and [inaudible 00:02:30]. All of that stuff. We've built tool sheds from scratch.

Emma Rice:

Oh, I'm jealous.

Ankur:

It's really satisfying, delightful work. [crosstalk 00:02:39]-

Emma Rice:

Welcome to your home. Welcome to your new home. It's fantastic. You've worked really hard to get this place. Well done.

Ankur:

We're really pleased, and also for those of you listening who know me, I don't think I would ever be described as the butchiest of types, but when you see me in my shorts with a sledgehammer, I think I put all of you... I would surprise everyone.

Emma Rice:

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I want to see that. I want a selfie next time, please, or maybe a little video. Maybe get Wayne to do a little video. I want to see that so much.

Ankur:

We'll create a gif.

Emma Rice:

Well, listen, this is a chance for me to catch up with friends, but also reminisce a little bit. I was thinking about the first time I feel I met you, but we actually didn't, was when I saw you... and to be straight with you... at the National Theatre. The amazing show, DV8 show, dance show by director and choreographer, Lloyd Newson. And it was a devastatingly hard-hitting piece. Really, really affecting. Really tough on the soul. Deep, dark issues.

Emma Rice:

And you came on and you were just as deep and just as profound and just as hard-hitting, but you had a lightness of spirit that shot through that piece like an arrow, like a golden arrow. And you skipped and you told this story, and it was as if with your skipping you gave us hope in a piece that had very little hope. And I can remember thinking, "I love him. I want to know him and I want to work with him." So that's the moment when I feel you came into my life.

Ankur:

Oh, wow. I mean, that's taken me aback a bit. It feels like such a long time ago. That would have been, I think, 2008?

Emma Rice:

Yeah, easily. Easily.

Ankur:

So more than a decade ago. And it's interesting, it was when I started my career in this country. It was my first job [inaudible 00:04:41] my apprenticeship and I'd wanted to work for DV8 for such a long time. It was a piece that was very important to me because, specifically, what I was doing was playing a lot of South Asian gay characters who were telling these harrowing stories of suffering homophobia and abuse within their religious communities. And this character you're talking about... it's a verbatim piece, so he's a real dude... he was 15 when he was stabbed by his father and left for dead for being gay, in the alley behind this family's house. He managed to come out of that with this hope and optimism for the world. It was such an honour to play him. And as an American, my first big job, playing this boy from home. A place I've never been to and an accent I barely understood. We got to travel the world, but also just tell these stories that were really important and meaningful. I'm so honoured that you loved it.

Emma Rice:

Oh, I certainly did. And as I say, your personality just shone through. I don't want to get bogged down in it, but you're such an interesting man, for many reasons. I met you as a dancer, but that's not... Tell me a little bit about your upbringing in American and your training, because this blows my mind.

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Ankur:

I'll try and keep it short. I grew up in California. My parents worked for the computer industry so I grew up in the Silicon Valley. I went to university to study journalism and got degrees in broadcast journalism. I was meant to be a TV news reporter and worked as that for a little while in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. But I'd grown up dancing. I'd grown up studying Bharatanatyam, South Indian classical dance, and I'd grown up skipping rope. I was on the US National Rope Skipping team.

Emma Rice:

Something that I only discovered very, very recently. Who knew there even was such a thing as a national rope skipping team?

Ankur:

There is, and I was on it. And so after university and after some apprenticeships as a journalist I realised I wanted to travel the world and I wanted to go back to dance, and so that brought me to Europe. I went to ballet school. I went to contemporary dance school here, and I started working as a dancer at that time. And then because of working for DV8 and other physical theatre companies and using a lot of text, it sort of opened up the possibility of working as an actor. And so I got to work as an actor, most importantly with you, and that's where our paths crossed. And then other things have happened since, but that's kind of where you and I met.

Emma Rice:

It's amazing. You're such a renaissance man and I think it's your super power and your curse. Because life spreads you a bit thin, doesn't it?

Ankur:

It can.

Emma Rice:

That's what I feel. Anyway, we'll get on to that later. But there's times when I can't work with you and I would like to, because you have other important things to do. But anyway, dancer, actor, journalist and many other things. Talk to me about your first music choice and why.

Ankur:

Okay. First of all, I found this really stressful, Emma. You know that, because I tend to overthink. I'm not impulsive. I found it stressful, because I was like, "Oh my goodness, Emma sent me this desert island discs task and the listeners will judge me for being uncultured or something." And then I was like, "Okay, let's just simplify it and pick three pieces of music that kind of mark the moments of your journey with Emma Rice."

Ankur:

And so, the first one is a song called Musafir Hoon Yaaro and it's from a Hindi film called Parichay, a Bollywood film from 1972. Sung by Kishore Kumar, who is a legend. Written by the famous R.D. Burman. And the lyrics are, "[foreign language 00:08:41]," which means, "I'm a traveler." It's basically a song about being someone who travels the world, who doesn't have a home, who travels on the

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wind. And as the son of immigrants, as an immigrant to this country myself, and as a traveling player for a lot of my career, it has always resonated with me. This song played in my house all the time. My father loved it. And it reminded me of our first job together, which was The Empress, in which I got to play Gandhi and use my skills as a [foreign language 00:09:15] dancer, but tell a really profoundly important Indian story, and an Indian story in Britain, of travellers. And so that's why I picked this song.

Ankur:

(singing).

Emma Rice:

Oh, I love it. It's got a little bit of Little House on the Prairie about it as well, hasn't it?

Ankur:

I really love it. It's based on an old Indian story, but also they took inspiration from The Sound of Music.

Emma Rice:

You can hear that. I love it. It's like proper sort of cheeky fusion, isn't it, really? And so romantic, as well.

Ankur:

[crosstalk 00:13:02] in the background.

Emma Rice:

Love it. So we met at... Well, we didn't meet, we started working together on a show called The Empress, written by Tanika Gupta, which was at the Swan in-

Ankur:

[inaudible 00:13:11] Tanika Gupta.

Emma Rice:

... hell, yes... which was on at The Swan in Stratford-upon-Avon. It was a magic time. For me, it was the continuation of journey that I'd started on Wah! Wah! Girls with Tanika and Sadler's Wells, which was the beginning of my love affair with India and Indian culture and Indian music, and my Indian friends now. But The Empress was a fantastic step on that journey and a piece that I'm incredibly proud of, although slightly fell between the gap, didn't it? It was between Michael Boyd's tenure... Michael had commissioned it... and Greg coming in. So we felt a little bit lost, didn't we, at the time, I remember? But maybe you always do. Maybe that's a permanent state of the artist.

Ankur:

I mean, I don't know how... I remember listening to Mark Antolin's chat with you the other week. It kind of felt like what happened with Romantic Anonymous, where you have a long... for us at least

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on The Empress, we had a longer rehearsal period than run. And that's always an odd scenario for something that's one, so big budget, so high profile, and so much work goes into. I think we all went into it assuming it would have another life and then it didn't. If you know you have a three week run and you've rehearsed for six weeks then you just kind of get on with it. But I think we all instinctively knew and felt like it should have had a longer run.

Emma Rice:

And it should. Gosh, maybe we'll return to it one day, but there was also a complication because it was the story of Queen Victoria and her servant Abdul Kareem, which was being made into the movie that now we've all seen. So there was a few other complications which have now, as ever, time sort of laps over those things gently, don't they? And what seems very important a long time ago is less important now. But I loved that show. I loved the mixture of cultures. My particular favorite bit, which you weren't there as choreographer, but you're such a sort of vibrant person that we started talking about it.

Emma Rice:

Really early on you said, "Well, I'm trained in classical Indian dance, Bharatanatyam. I could teach you some steps." And I was like, 'Hell, yeah. Let's do that'. And you started teaching the whole group this beautiful, very formal Indian dance, which then we blended throughout the show. And at the end I had white women in crinolines doing Bharatanatyam and fusing Indian classical music with Forgive our Foolish Ways, which was my granny's favourite hymn. And it was so, so beautiful.

Ankur:

But I think its so emblematic, as well, of your process. We started that as, "Let's just do warm ups. We'll do warm ups of Indian classical dance, because that's part of how we all get a little bit of a sense of where we are." And that then blossomed into something else. For people who haven't worked with you in the past, I think one of the most surprising things that you realise the first time of working with you is that so much is possible, so long as you're open to offering. I think that's one of those things. It was just an offering that became quite important to the production, in the end.

Emma Rice:

Hugely important. Absolutely the absolute backbone of it, sort of mixing the formality of both cultures. That's what I loved. It was really matching them for profound, artistic, historical worth. You brought that into the room, and it was sensational. Sensational.

Ankur:

With the Victorian era being such a formal period, in many ways, I think that it felt... You just felt it in the room, didn't you? It just felt right to offer that. And Tanika was brilliant as well, being like, "Yeah, let's do what we want to do with this script." I think for a writer it can be quite tough bringing an offering into a room that you've worked so hard on and then watching actors just play with it. And I think it was a really magical [crosstalk 00:17:28].

Emma Rice:

It was brilliant. And I also remember, not only did you play Gandhi, you played [Singh 00:17:33]. Do you remember Singh? Tiny. I think it had something like three lines? And I love you for this. I was

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thinking, "Oh, we'll just get this scene, it'll be just a quick in and out, say two lines and off." And you sprang in and you leapt onto the table in one leap. It was like a gazelle. And we all gasped. And you were so physical. You were like a coiled spring. And I thought, "That's my guy." Because you have a burning creativity and a gentle ambition, because you were like, "Well, I'm not going to just come on say two lines, am I?"

Ankur:

Do you know what was really interesting about that, is in the season before that... I had been at the RSC the season before, where I've done three plays: *Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Comedy of Errors*. And in *Twelfth Night* my only line was, "Will you go hunt, my lord?" I played Curio. And then in *The Tempest*, I didn't speak. And then in *Comedy of Errors*, I was the messenger who has something like four or six lines. Basically, I was brought on to be a physical performer and then I understudied tons of leads. And it was fantastic season, but I also realised that if you've only got this much time on stage, you've got to do something with it. And I think that treatment of Singh was probably a layover of a very, very long season at the RSC playing small parts.

Emma Rice:

Well, I love it. One of the things I often say to actors is, "Make me an offer", because I don't know. You know, I'm nothing. If it's just in my head, I already know what's in my head and what's in my body. I want to see what's in everybody else's heads. And you just burst in. I live for moments like that, and I cherish it. Let's move on to your next track. Tell me why.

Ankur:

The next one is Beyonce. It's *Drunk in Love*, because it's one of favourite Beyonce tracks. I know I probably should have picked something off *Lemonade*, but this one's... I love it. I also picked it because my partner and I went to a Beyonce concert early in my relationship, and we were standing there singing to all of the tracks and dancing around. This was in Cardiff and it was not full. It was before she'd sort of busted out as a big solo artist. It was just after *Destiny's Child*.

Ankur:

We were dancing around and she pointed at my partner Wayne and she's like, "I see you", and she said, "in the yellow shirt." He was the only one around in a yellow shirt, so we know she saw him. She was extraordinary, and she connected with us as humans in that space in such a special way. It reminded me not only of, one, *Dream* for a specific reason related to Beyonce on *Dream*, but also what we tried to do at *Midsummer Night's Dream* at The Globe, which was really connect human to human, especially with the humans in the yard. And obviously you can share why Beyonce's important to *Midsummer Night's Dream* when you want to.

Emma Rice:

Oh, Queen Bey. Magnificent. So let's talk about *Dream*, before we go back to Beyonce. I had got the job at The Globe but I was the artistic director designate. So I was in my office in the car park, which is where I planned my first season, and I knew I was going to do *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, although it wasn't my first choice originally. For various boring reasons, I did think, "Why am I resisting this, Emma? On some level, you have to do *A Dream* one day, so what is your issue with it?"

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And I realised very quickly I had only one issue with *Midsummer's Night Dream*, which is I don't think the character of Helena is okay.

Emma Rice:

I don't want to find a female actor and put those words in her mouth. I don't want her to say, "Treat me as a dog." I don't want her to say, "Beat me. Do what you will with me," and then for her to marry the guy. I just thought, "I have a really deep issue with this." And it immediately came to me. The question is why does she still love Demetrius and why does Demetrius not love her if we're expected to be happy when they get together at the end? And it dawned on me, what if this is a gay relationship? What if this is two men, one of them denying his homosexuality, and the other one desperate in love and desperate for the truth that they had once experienced?

Emma Rice:

But I was scared, and with hindsight, I was quite right to be scared, because I've thought this might look like it was an imposition, look like it was too clever. And I called you up and I said, "Ankur, will you come and talk to me about an idea?" and we sat in my office in that car park and we talked about it. Tell me what your memory of that time is.

Ankur:

It was extraordinary. Wait, but I want to know, what were you thinking of doing if it wasn't going to be *Midsummer Night's Dream*?

Emma Rice:

I was going to do *Shrew*, and I was actually going to do looking at a sort of slightly Asian version of *Shrew* and got scared of that, as well. But I was interested in that.

Ankur:

Ooh, we should make Asian *Shrew*, anyway. But [inaudible 00:28:00]. I remember getting a call from you, and let's not lie, you talk about my quiet ambition. I actually think my ambition's much bigger than quiet and [crosstalk 00:28:13]-

Emma Rice:

Your very noisy ambition.

Ankur:

... very generous to me. But it was a call that I was hoping would come. I was like, "Emma Rice is now the artistic director of *The Globe*. I'm hoping I'm getting a call." And you called. So I very diligently read the play and all the rest, and it was, without a doubt, the best pre-rehearsal meeting I've ever had in my entire career. It wasn't an audition, right?

Emma Rice:

No.

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Ankur:

It was like old collaborators getting together, but it was very clear you had questions to solve as a creative. For any actors who are listening, you go in, you chat for 10 minutes about a part, and you leave. This was two hours of us sitting around a table, reading, discussing, drinking tea, testing it. It was one of the most satisfying experiences as a performer to be able to go, "Here's an artist who trusts me to bring something to the table. A director who's not auditioning me, who's inviting me to question an artistic thesis." And, also, I consider myself to be a Shakespearean and so I love to play with Shakespeare. I love to play in that way, and it was magical. I wish more people could have just been in that meeting just to... it would have destroyed the meeting if there were more there... but to experience what I treasure so much about that moment.

Emma Rice:

I treasure it, too. Of the many things, the intimacy and the intellect and the care that we held in our hands in that meeting, but what was extraordinary was going through the text and realising that not a line needed to change. Not a line. I think in the end we only changed "lady" to "lover" for gender, and I think there was one couplet about a heart in the wood or something. It just fell out. The idea just fell out of us and fell out of the play. Again, I just sort of thought, "This Shakespeare guy is amazing, because the malleability of what he wrote..." We didn't impose the end idea, we really didn't. In fact, we weren't criticised for it, because it worked.

Ankur:

Yeah. And what's interesting is I've had people come up to me now, all these years later, going, "I've studied this now as a gender studies piece on Shakespeare, as a real..." There are academics who are looking at this work, and we never meant to make this an academic exercise. This was a very human exercise for us and a very personal exercise for both of us. And interestingly, people are now referring to this work as an important moment in this conversation around gender and Shakespeare, which for us was very instinctive, in some ways.

Ankur:

Interestingly, the only thing that... I left that meeting going, "Yeah, can work, can see what Emma says. We're not going to have to change a lot. It's fine. It makes complete sense to me as a gay man telling this story. I've had that relationship before. I know what that is. I've been Demetrius in that relationship before, early out in my coming out journey." But I think what's interesting is I didn't necessarily buy... You knew in that meeting you wanted to call him Helenus. And I thought we didn't have to change the name. I felt we could call him Helena. In the end, Helenus was the right choice.

Emma Rice:

I hope so. That's just the choices you make. I felt Helena was a girl's name and I felt that I couldn't get beyond... I'd be asking questions constantly. But I'm so proud of it. The other thing is I couldn't believe it... I can remember almost gasping with excitement thinking, "Why the hell hasn't this been done before?" Because it's so right. It's so right. That's when you feel the adrenaline go and your breath rise, and you think, "We're really onto something really special." That continued throughout the whole Dream journey, all the way through Pride, the way through those... London just flocked to celebrate that gay kiss at the end. Oh, my goodness. The wonderful diverse cast we had. It felt like it was such a moment for multicultural, open-hearted, tolerant London, and I will take that with me to my dying day.

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Ankur:

It was such a special time. It's literally one of the happiest moments in my entire working and human lives. I will treasure it forever. But also, do you remember, that summer was when there was the shootings at the gay club in Florida?

Emma Rice:

Oh, yes. And do you remember that... Ooh, gosh, I've gone all goose pimply. So, I wanted it to be very much of today. I wanted it to be what I thought was very much genuinely original practice, which is we're in modern clothes and it was today, and then the fairies were Elizabethan. So I felt like we were absolutely spanning the two arms of original practice, Elizabeth and modern day. And when the audience came in, I usually play some music. How do you warm the space? What's the incoming music? And everything I thought of felt wrong. And at the end I said, "We've got to not editorialize it. Because it's today, it needs to be live." We chose to play Radio Two live every day, which meant sometimes people were going, "Why are you playing that dreadful music?" and I'd say, "Because it's now. It's what's happening today."

Emma Rice:

I think [Nanda 00:34:10] used to read today's Metro, didn't she? So the clues were that it was of today. And that day, it was a Sunday, because we started at 1:00, not 2:00, and we were slightly late, and the news hit and it was live and it was about the shooting at the gay club. I can remember thinking, "This is so important. What we're doing is so important."

Ankur:

And not to overemphasise it, but I think at the same time it felt... I think a lot of us were heart broken, by what we heard was happening and the news that was coming out. But also, it was incredibly powerful to tell that story in that moment in The Globe, which is one of the most, as you describe it, democratic spaces in theatre. There are so many things about *Midsummer Night's Dream* that are really special to me, but there were also so many moments in that time that reminded us that what we were doing was important for now. It was important for why we were doing Shakespeare now and why we were telling these stories now. I think we will agree to disagree with half of the global Shakespeareans on how to play Shakespeare, I suppose, but to what I love about Shakespeare and what I care about doing when I do Shakespeare, we hit the nail on the head.

Emma Rice:

Here's something to remind you. You're going to hear Katy Owen, Ed Derrington, Ncuti Gatwa, Ankur Bahl and Anjana Vassan.

Audio:

Up and down. Up and down. I will lead them up and down. I am feared in field and town. Goblin lead them up and down. Here comes one.

Audio:

Where art thou, proud Demetrius? Speak thou now.

Audio:

Here, villain, drawn and ready. Where art thou?

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Audio:

I will be with thee straight.

Audio:

Follow me then to plainer ground.

Audio:

Lysander, speak again. Thou runaway, thou coward, art thou fled? Speak. In some bush? Where dost thou hide thy head?

Audio:

Thou coward, are thou bragging to the stars? Telling the bushes that thou look'st for wars and wilt not come? Come, recreant. Come, thou coward. I'll whip thee with a rod.

Audio:

Yeah, art thou there?

Audio:

Follow my voice. We'll try no manhood here.

Audio:

He goes before me and still dares me on. When I come where he calls, then he is gone. The villain is much lighter-heeled than I. I followed fast, but faster he did fly. That fallen am I in dark uneven way and here will rest me. Come, thou gentle day. For if but once thou show me thy gray light, I'll find Demetrius and revenge this spite.

Audio:

Ha, ha, ha, coward, why comest thou not?

Audio:

Abide me, if thou darest. For well I wot thou runn'st before me, shifting every place and darest not stand nor look me in the face. Where art thou now?

Audio:

Come hither. I am here.

Audio:

Nay then, thou mock'st me. Thou shalt buy this dear if ever I thy face by daylight see. Now go thy way. Faintness constraineth me to measure out my length on this cold bed. But day's approach looks to be visited.

Audio:

Oh weary night. Oh long and tedious night, abate thy hours. Shine comforts from the east, that I may back to London by daylight from these that my poor company detest. And sleep, that sometimes shuts up sorrow's eye, steal me awhile from mine own company.

Audio:

Yet but three? Come one more. Three plus one makes up four. Here she comes, cursed and sad. Cupid is a knavish lad thus to make poor females mad.

Audio:

Never so weary, never so in woe. Bedabbled with the dew and torn with briars. I can no further crawl, no further go. My legs can keep no pace with my desires. Here will I rest me till the break of day. Heavens shield Lysander if they mean affray.

Emma Rice:

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It's amazing hearing it again, isn't it, and hearing the audience gasping? But also... I would say this, wouldn't I... but people talk so much about the technology and all of that stuff, which was immaterial to the work we made. What you hear in that is how serious it was, the alchemy we created, and the bravery of the production. I have such artistic pride in what we created.

Ankur:

I'd forgotten that soundtrack, the score behind it. It created such a beautiful tension. Do you remember, in the rehearsal room we were like, "Okay, these guys are running through the woods and they're becoming more and more tired, more and more ravaged by this situation, but we need this to happen in this space and we need it to happen like this?" And you had a moment where you were like, "Okay, I want you guys to run in circles and then I want you to stop, take a deep breath in, and do some kind of roll at these moments." And then you had four actors in front of you going, "Really? I'm 90% sure this isn't going to get on stage, but I have to see it, so can you guys lead?" It was an evening rehearsal, and we were like, "Okay, fine." And lo and behold, that was the answer.

Emma Rice:

It worked. That was magic. That was one of those rare evening rehearsals where it just works, again, and you just have to have those moments. Don't get complicated. Don't question it. Just go, "Wow. We just found something."

Ankur:

The genius of Etta Murfitt.

Emma Rice:

Oh, yes. Big shout out to Et. Let's move on. Let's go on to Wise Children. When I started my new company, post Globe, you were a great friend to me throughout the whole of The Globe debacle, whatever we call it. But when I came out in Wise Children and I was looking for a company that represented my past and my present and my future, you were right at the top of my list, and there you were as my Melchior Hazard. I'm going to go straight in. Let's play a little bit from Wise Children to take us there.

Emma Rice:

So I cast you as a great Shakespearean, a great thespian... I thought it was going to play to all your theatrical strengths... but also a bad guy. He wasn't a very impressive man, was he? Talk to me a bit about your journey with Wise Children.

Ankur:

Interestingly, I think what had happened to me between *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Wise Children* is I'd left performing. I'd worked as a business consultant and gone to very serious business. Then you reached out and were like, "I'm starting a company and I want to do this thing." When I heard that, I basically told them I was leaving and came [inaudible 00:44:01] you. So it was such a marvelous, magical time. But, yes, Melchior was an incredibly difficult character, in that you can understand where he's coming from, and in so many ways Melchior Hazard's ambition is completely aligned to mine. We're both great actors, great performers, great story tellers, great Shakespeareans. So I really resonated with him, but at the same time, he's a bit of a nasty piece of work.

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Emma Rice:

Well, he's selfish in a way that I would say you're not. You may share ambitions and talents, but not the fierce selfishness that he had. It was great casting from me, can I say? Because you didn't hate him. You understood the guy that spoke Shakespeare as he was made homeless as a child. You understood that, the poet in him, didn't you?

Ankur:

I think that's the thing, as well. I think I did feel that. There were moments in the rehearsal room that became a little bit awkward, because I defend him so fiercely and I would say slightly offensive things to other actors and characters, trying to be like, "Look, I don't think you understand where he's coming from." One of the things about that is one Angela Carter wrote an incredibly beautiful and complex character who has multiple sides. So he's not just like a full villain, but he's also not completely forgivable, right? And I think there's a complexity to him that was nice, but yes, I did defend him and I did understand him.

Emma Rice:

Well, that's also the actor's job, isn't it, to love your own character, to understand your own character?

Ankur:

Also, devise process, right?

Emma Rice:

Yeah.

Ankur:

[inaudible 00:46:05] why that character should have its space in the story you're telling. It's not my job, in the room, to be able to edit it down. My job is to go, "This is a character and this is why this character is important. Here's how we tell his or her story. Let's do that. His/her/their story, but let's do that." And then it's your job to go whether or not that's part of the full narrative or not. It's one of the reasons I love being an actor, because I could just fully dive in and be like, "Here, Emma, is the full realm of possibility, you rein it in."

Emma Rice:

Oh, I love it. One of the reasons I set up Wise Children was, obviously, to make the work that I cared about with the people that I love, but I also wanted to make a touring theater company that really understood and accepted what it's like to tour, understood how hard it is, also how marvelous it can be, but took seriously how, as a company, we could make that better. Now, my Wise Children company was full of strikers, to use the football analogy, which means they're all bloody brilliant, but can also a bit tricky at times.

Emma Rice:

I can remember saying to you all at one point, "Right, how are we going to make this touring thing work?" And everybody's a little bit grumpy, a little bit independent, but you guys got together and

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we wrote a manifesto. You decided, as a team, that you would take it in turns to share skills with each other... because it was a very highly skilled company... and run warm-ups, which became this sort of amazing thing, this amazing tradition. So I've chosen a piece for you to remind you of the warm-ups that you would lead, the Bhangra warm-ups that you would teach us, hilariously, to attempt. I'm afraid I cannot pronounce it, but we think we've found it on Shazam and it translates as Beware the Boys.

Emma Rice:

(singing).

Emma Rice:

When I stepped into cover Etta for a couple of weeks, that was my most joyful bit, was doing the different warm-ups, and your Bhangra one was my absolute favourite.

Ankur:

The warm-ups were great and Bhangra's a good way to warm yourself up, but also remember, we used Bhangra in the curtain call in Dream.

Emma Rice:

Yes.

Ankur:

And it was one of those moments that the audiences just went mad for, and laughed.

Emma Rice:

Well, it's folk, isn't it, which is what works at The Globe. There's a great, deep folk where we all get it. We all feel it. It's powerful stuff.

Ankur:

And as a proper Punjabi lad, I'm very proud to bring that [inaudible 00:52:23] ensemble ending. So, happy to [inaudible 00:52:26].

Emma Rice:

Talk to me about your last choice, which I'm so delighted you've made.

Ankur:

I was born in the '80s and I'm a kid of the '80s, very much so. This song was one of those songs that I would just sing in my house all the time. Also, in the '80s, when my family moved from Chicago to California, and we drove, and I remember it being on the radio a lot during that road trip. I was quite young, but it was on. And I fancied the lead singer. Everything about it. It's intimately catchy and it will make you smile. So it's Wham! Wake Me Up Before You Go Go.

Emma Rice:

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Before we play it, we have to also say the place as has in our hearts, because at the end of Wise Children I wanted everybody to sing a song and I wanted it to be a song from the year that Angela Carter died. Which off the top of my head, it's the late '80s, isn't it? I wanted to bring us up to modern times and I chose Wake Me Up Before You Go Go, and we learned the most beautiful acapella harmonies and it was perfect.

Emma Rice:

It's all about dancing. It's all about jitter bugging. It was so perfect to sing to a baby. And we didn't get the rights. It broke my heart, and I truly believed there could never be a song that would be as good, that that was the perfect choice. I couldn't accept it, because I tend to get my own way in life. But I had to accept it. The George Michael estate wouldn't let us use it, and that was when we did Girls Just Wanna Have Fun, which became then became the anthem.

Ankur:

Really?

Emma Rice:

I know.

Ankur:

He did us a favor in the end.

Emma Rice:

Well, I suppose so, although I'd still like to see the George Michael version as well. But I love Girls Just Wanna Have Fun, and in the end, it's a great lesson, isn't it, that there's always another choice and there's always another meaning and that there's always another chapter.

Ankur:

But you're right, Ian Ross created the most beautiful harmonies to this song. For those of you who, at some point, have the pleasure of listening to that track, which I think you should turn into a fundraiser for Wise Children, it's a very special piece of music, and Ian Ross is a genius.

Emma Rice:

So before I let George Michael play us out, thank you for having tea and biscuits with me, or Gavi and biscuits with me. Gavi and pistachios. Can I say thank you? Thank you for being the cleverest, most considered, challenging, creative and surprising performer I've worked with, and also for your sensational loyalty as a friend. It's a privilege to know you. I'm looking forward to stealing you back from your current important position and putting you back on stage, which is where, for my money, you should be.

Ankur:

Emma Rice, I love you and I'll be there.

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Emma Rice:

If you have a memory or connection you'd like to share on Tea & 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 & Biscuits is part of Wise Children's Lockdown. Thanks for hanging out with us. Bye.