

# Wise Children's Tea & Biscuits

## Emma Rice & Laura Keefe

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 & Biscuits.

Hello, and welcome to Wise Children's Lockdown Tea & Biscuits. And today, I am talking to my friend and colleague, Laura Keefe! Hello, Laura!

Laura:

Hello, Emma Rice!

Emma:

So my first question is, what is your choice of virtual or real biscuit today?

Laura:

Well, I kind of been cheating. I like two. So my virtual choice is a pink wafer, because they're pink, and they're fabulous. And then my real life choice that I have with me is a shortbread that I actually brought from my parents' from the Lake District.

Emma:

Oh, delicious! Pink wafer, I haven't had a pink wafer in decades!

Laura:

Isn't it great? I don't think they're that good in tea, though, that's the only thing.

Emma:

Oh, fair point. And where are you? How is your lockdown going? Paint me a picture.

Laura:

I am currently at my mom and dad's house in Sheffield, and I am in their little extension which I have kind of commandeered as my space. So it's my yoga studio in the morning, and then it's my workspace, and then it's my home cinema. So I spend all day in here.

Emma:

So I'm a bit surprised at that. We might go back to this later, but I thought you were in Keswick. So when did you move from Keswick to Sheffield?

Laura:

I moved just over a week ago, so I'm going into my second week here in Sheffield. But I was in Keswick when the lockdown happened, because that's how we're doing Mallory Towers. And I spent the first five weeks in Keswick, which was the best decision I ever made.

Emma:

I know. Well, you kept sending really tantalizingly beautiful pictures of the landscape, and your hourly exercise looked like the best of anybody's.

Laura:

Yeah, I think ... or three hourly, exercise, climbing mountains and walking around lakes. Yeah, no, it was beautiful. [inaudible 00:02:34] for three hours.

Emma:

We'll get onto Keswick later, but I'm going to kick off our music choices with an excerpt from the first show that we worked on together. We'd met before, but the first show we worked on was Romantics

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Anonymous, and this is the hymn, as I call it, from the Romantics Anonymous meetings, The Émotifs, people that find life a bit too emotional, so here we are, it's The Émotifs.

(singing)

Oh, my goodness, we're both shedding [inaudible 00:06:48] tear, aren't we? It's a bit of a hymn for lockdown as well, isn't it?

Laura:

Yeah. I'm really glad that you chose that one from that show, actually, because I thought you might choose a different one, but I just love them so much.

I remember in the show that if there was anyone in the audience that wasn't quite on board, the moment that The Émotifs came out, that was when everyone got on board. It's just suddenly, it was a stage full of these weirdos who were just so relatable, like everybody is.

Emma:

Struggle was tough, and we all did. And I should just say that brilliant song, music by Michael Kooman, lyrics by the brilliant Chris Diamond. Hello, Michael and Chris, if you're listening, from New York.

So yeah, so let's go back a little bit. We met at The Globe, and in fact, you came to work on another show. The first time I met you was when you assisted on Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Laura:

Yes, yes.

Emma:

So talk to me a little bit. Take me back. Talk to me about your journey as a director, and what brought you to The Globe, eventually.

Laura:

Oh, gosh, that's long. Well, I started directing about 10-15 years ago, and I moved to London like Dick Whittington. I had no job or university or drama school to go to. I just packed my bags and I moved out, and started directing [crosstalk 00:08:16] ...

Emma:

From Sheffield?

Laura:

... yeah, from Sheffield

I was very cheeky, and I kind of [inaudible 00:08:24] with it, and so I was like, "What do you do?" And one of them, Young Vic ... it's kind of the National Theater for Directors, and they ran a course. So I got accepted into instructions directing course, which was run by Matthew Dunster, who later became your associate director at The Globe.

And he thought I was all right. So he took me on and kind mentored me and got me work, and he's who eventually then got me in to come and work with you guys at The Globe.

Which at the time, I remember being a little bit confused about, because one, I hadn't been assisting that much, and I had already worked at The Globe. It was one of my first jobs. I assisted on a show there, many moons ago. And also, I had worked on Two Gentlemen of Verona before. I actually assisted Matthew on it, which, for the least-staged Shakespeare show, I might have confused why I thought it was a good idea that I did it a second time. I'm probably the only person that sat and had done two productions of it.

Emma:

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Yeah, the odds are against that, aren't they?

Laura:

Yeah. But I'm so glad that I did, because I met you, and I met the lovely Nick Bagnall who's become a friend, and worked with an amazing group of people. Jim Fortune, and Tom Jackson Greaves, and some wonderful actors.

It got me into The Globe and in the building when you were there and you were running it. It just felt like such a wonderful time to be there, and it felt like I could be there when I maybe hadn't felt like I fit in there before.

Emma:

Oh, and you certainly did. The minute I met you, I was like, "This is one top bird!" Really got your work ethic, and you got me as well, which was really exciting.

But talk a little bit more, because you've got such an unusual route into directing. As you say, not going to drama school, just going into the industry. One of the things I love when I hear you talk to younger directors and, because you've helped me at the School for Wise Children, is when you talk about how you used the fact that you weren't front of house, and a box office, and theaters to your advantage. Talk to me a little bit about that.

Laura:

Oh, I hope these people aren't listening. Yeah, I suppose I do have quite an unusual route, because I got the theater bit quite young. I danced when I was younger, I did youth theater. I think I initially thought I wanted to act, because that's the first people that you see when you go into theater. But I was rubbish. I mean, it took me a while to work out what the different jobs were and then what to direct. And I think by that point, university and jobs just didn't feel like an option for me. I never was really into academia.

So I've been really fortunate. I worked at The Crucible in Sheffield, and the artist director and associate director that were there at the time were really good and they always had the door open. I kind of learned that the producing theaters offer a lot of kind of workshops and free training opportunities for people.

So when I came to London, I was aware that was the situation. So I kind of knocked up all the theaters that were producing, but I was there to pay my rent. I started working ... well, initially on the bar, and then as an usher because I got demoted because I was so useless. Always having time off to make shows.

But yeah, I started working in the West End, and it was vital in terms of it made me not very much money but enough money to pay my rent. It was just evenings. I could go and assist or direct my own stuff in the day.

Everybody that works in theater, particularly in London, probably are out of work ... actors, or writers, or directors. So the people that run with it was really good, and I used to use the theater in the daytime to hold auditions or rehearse readings. I'd always print my scripts off there, print out like 200 pages worth of plays. I'd beg them for tickets so I could do a quiz and raise some money for shows, take them to Edinburgh, and that would be the prize. Yeah, that's them.

Emma:

I just love it. I just feel that you're a pinup for making things happen in a really unusual way. I just also think there's just an entrepreneurial spirit in the way that you've managed your career that is unlike anybody else I've ever met, so I really wanted to hear you talk about that, because I love how you just packed your bags and then have worked your way around theater.

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And also, you're so well-connected. I love the fact ... if ever I'm struggling to cast somebody, you've met so many young actors, so many young creatives as well. You've managed to make a huge network for yourself that I'm just in awe of.

Laura:

Aw, thanks! I'm in awe and I have so much respect for you and what you do that identified that maybe actually taking yourself out of London enabled you to make your work and make the work that you wanted to make, in the way that you wanted to make it, and carve out your own niche that now everyone recognizes, and that's why they employ you.

Emma:

But that's interesting, because I think that's true, but I had to get out of London to find my entrepreneurial way of making a network, but you're the only person I know who has sort of done it underground in London by selling ice creams.

Laura:

Yeah. I've got so many good stories in selling ice creams, one involving James Gordon.

Yeah, no, it's interesting, because I do ... I should not repeat it ... I do think about it sometimes, so I'm pleased that I actually took that route, and that I have genuinely probably worked for most theaters in the country. I know a lot of that was because I just needed to take any job that I could to pay the rent. So I do a lot of work with young people, and drama schools and universities.

But also it's just meant that I've worked with so many people. And I think that's my nature. I have a lot of friends. I'm very sociable. I'm very nosy. So I kind of like to have a lot of fingers in lots of pies.

Emma:

Which is very good for a director, and very good for me, as well, because you do really help me out. You're my go-to person when I'm trying to find somebody.

Let's have another piece of music. I'm afraid I'm going to do the second one as well before I get onto your choices, because the next time we work together after *Romantics Anonymous* at The Globe was, you came and helped me with *Brief Encounter*, a show that I'd remade many times, and was opening in the cinema on Haymarket at the same time that I was leaving The Globe.

It was the coldest winter going into the hottest summer, wasn't it? My memory is we didn't have a single normal day of weather in this non-purpose built building with no air conditioning. But you were fantastic. You came and joined the team and brought a whole new energy to me, and the work, and gave me such a lift at quite a tricky time for lots of reasons.

So let's just enjoy a little bit of *Go Slow, Johnny* from *Brief Encounter*.

Laura:

Yay!

Emma:

(singing)

Oh, the beautiful tones of Stu McLoughlin singing *Go Slow, Johnny* from the original cast of *Brief Encounter*. I mean, what a crazy time was that?

Laura:

Oh, it was mental! It was *The Beast From The East*, that's why it was so cold!

Emma:

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It was, wasn't it?

Laura:

Yeah! The only time I ever remember, there was no transport in London. The buses had stopped. We were in the Haymarket and the street was covered in snow. They kept the doors open because they were bringing all the set in, so we just sat in this cinema with doors open, *The Beast From The East*, no meeting.

Emma:

The coldest I've ever been in England.

Laura:

Yeah, and then the following week it was 30°.

Emma:

And the poor writers, they were either literally hypothermic or passing out from heat stroke, weren't they? It was just a sort of ridiculous and incredible time. And didn't we get so cold we used to trudge our way through the snow up to the cinema near Piccadilly, because we could warm up, couldn't we? It was the only place that had any heating.

Laura:

Yeah, because we had those makeshift kind of gas canister heating which was very unsafe. Of course, and my memory of that is that there weren't any cleaners, or the cinema hadn't been in use, right? So it was just really dirty from the front-of-house, there was popcorn everywhere. So you had requested a vacuum and a bin bag, and then you cleaned all the auditorium. So I've got a video of you in like a willy hat, and your thermals on vacuuming.

Emma:

I think I was just wearing all of my clothes in one go, vacuuming. But as you know, I am a woman who likes to clean the auditorium for a tech.

Laura:

It's true, it's true, and I'm with you on that, and you cleaned the rehearsal room [crosstalk 00:21:46] ...

Emma:

Because the creatives are animals, aren't they? They just buy coffee, buy snacks and never chuck them away. But then they're working so hard, I felt, "Well, the least I can do is just clear it away for them." But anyway, that's me [crosstalk 00:21:57] ...

Laura:

Yeah, and we'd always have that much to do at that play.

Emma:

But directors don't have that much to do in tech, because everybody else gets busy, doesn't it? So yeah, I turn into cleaning lady, because I always think we're a proud people. You need to keep a creative, clean space. When did I turn into that person?

Laura:

Maybe you always were that person.

Emma:

Well, probably. My mom wouldn't say that. I was very, very messy as a teenager, but a bit tidier now.

Laura:

Yes, yeah.

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Emma:

So we did brief, and then I left The Globe. Romantics was playing right up to the end, so you were by my side through the whole of that last chapter, and then Wise Children was born.

And you came and joined Wise Children for the production Malory Towers, which has been really special for both of us, hasn't it?

Laura:

Yeah, very much so. It's been a very big part of our lives for the last few years.

Emma:

It has. I'm grinning thinking about it, because it's still such a ridiculous project. Can't believe it happened, really.

But it's been so much about young people and young women and a spirit of hope and generosity. Both companies have bonded into the most extraordinary teams, and I think you've been a really big part of that as my associate. You often are more in the body of a company than I am, sometimes. But talk to me a little bit about those companies.

Laura:

It's a funny one, actually, because as far as this is ... the majority of the menu to you, as well, which is quite an unusual situation to be in, and actually the majority of them have been new to me, whereas I think both of us have access that we regularly work with, and I've got familiar with those companies.

So it was really exciting to have brand new actors, and really young actors. They're fresh out of drama school, and are super-talented. There's nothing that any of them can't do. They all sing like angels, play all the instruments, dance incredibly.

And we're all kind of just very unique and special individuals, and I think that's the same as all the characters in Malory Towers. That's what worked. I suppose I sat somewhere in the middle of, I'm not their age, I'm not their generation. But then I'm somewhere kind of in the middle of them, and you in your crazy phase, so.

Emma:

What are you saying, Laura, are you saying that I'm even older?

Laura:

Just a little bit! A couple of years older than me.

Emma:

No, you're absolutely right. You hold onto me at one end, and them at the other, it's been really, really enjoyable.

Laura:

It's a funny situation to be in when you find that you're not part of the young group anymore.

Emma:

I was always ... because my birthday's in August, the very end of August, so I was always the youngest at school. I was the youngest in the family, and then I was the youngest who went to drama school. And for years, I was the youngest. I still wake up and think, "Surely, I'm the baby," but there's a funny memory when you're not anymore.

Malory Towers really is the illustration of that, because like you say, there's this amazing energy, and brilliant young people just making phenomenal work.

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We'll talk a bit about the passenger shed in a minute, but introduce your first choice of music and why.

Laura:

My first choice of music is from Malory Towers. It's the first piece of music that's played in Malory Towers.

I have to say, shamefully, that before we did Malory Towers the first time, I never had heard of this artist or this song, and she's now probably the biggest recording artist in the world. I am now a mega fan, and I've listened to her album loads. It's Billie Eilish, Bad Guy.

Emma:

(singing)

I was having a bop to that. I love that piece of music. The minute I heard it on the radio, I was like, "Oh, I want to use that!" And at the time when we first did Malory Towers, it really only had just been released. So I felt it was a real marker for any young people coming to see that show, that they'd go, "Wait a minute! We thought we were going to see something set in the 1940s," and Billie Eilish is playing.

I still love it, but now I get the adrenaline, because whenever that started playing, we knew the show was going to start. So I've got that sort of beginner's call feeling, "Oh, my God. We're going to start. Is everybody ready?"

Laura:

And I remember you chose it as well. I remember being in the rehearsal room with the really young cast, and you saying to them "What would kids listen to in school at the moment?" None of them had any idea, and you chose that piece of music.

Emma:

I did. Well, I think I heard it on Radio 1 and just thought, "What an amazing sound." Then I asked my step kids, "Is this cool?" And they both said yes. Now at that point ... that never happens. I never suggest cool music to them, so I thought, "Well, I'm onto a winner here if I like it, and they think it's cool."

So Passenger Shed. We've done all of the elements, haven't we, because if we have The Brief Encounter and The Best From The East, we opened Malory Towers in the heat wave!

Laura:

30%! In another building without any air conditioning, or windows or doors.

But also, it wasn't just ... the Passenger Shed, we had to rehearsal space beforehand, and for some reason, the air con didn't work in those spaces. I doubt if you can remember, but we were roasting in East London, and then when we got to Bristol. Boiling. Sweating.

Emma:

It was ridiculous, wasn't it? And so when we'd got those big gas heaters in the Haymarket Cinema in London, and in the Passenger Shed we had those pathetic coolers which were ... they were massive, really expensive, and we had to fill them up with water. Really noisy, but it was just like a tiny whisper of cool air, wasn't it? You had to stand right close to it to try and get your body temperature down.

Laura:

Yeah. I have a picture of you, I think, standing in front of it with your top over the fan, trying to get some coolness at your back. So I resorted and I went to Wilkinson's and I bought us a pound, little hand fan.

Emma:

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Which was the best thing anybody's ever bought me! One of those battery little fans.

But I had to try not to complain too much, because the poor cast were wearing woolen blazers, woolen gym slips, shirts, and then underneath it, those sort of vintage bathing costumes as well. So I kept thinking, "God, if they can do dance routines wearing wool, I can't complain too much."

But it was a really extreme way to open the show. But it was just so full of joy, so full of joy. And then went on to a lovely tour, which you took care of.

Laura:

Yes, I went to all the venues on tour, which was delightful.

Emma:

So for anybody who's listening ... Laura is my associate, which is sort of one step up from an assistant, because she's definitely one step up. I'm really lucky to work with you. But for anybody listening, describe what that job is, being an associate director, what you do, what your tasks are?

Laura:

It's quite similar to being an assistant initially. So I'm in the rehearsal room with you, and I'm assisting you in the rehearsal room, and if it's a remount ... so we've now remounted Malory Towers, and Romantics Anonymous ... then in that instant, I'm often kind of getting up and giving all of the blocking before you kind of get your teeth into it. So I've got a mounted script of what we did last time.

But then when the show is up and running and it goes out on the road, for both of those shows, we've had understudies. So I work with the understudies. I rehearse them, I get them up to speed. I work out what happens if anyone ever goes off sick, what that means for the rest of the cast and the creative team, and their stage management and crew.

And then I go to all of tour venues and I'll tech each show in, so just make sure I'm there on the first day, make sure that it's looking and sounding lovely. And then do a little bit of stroking, a little bit of listening, just making sure everyone's all right and not folding out at all, and then give you a call and let you know what's going on.

Emma:

It's a really big job. It's a really big job, and one that ... elements of it, I literally wouldn't know where to start.

So the way that you can break the show down into understudy tracks, and what would happen to every prop in the instance of somebody going off is such a detailed bit of work that you do so easily. You don't sort of weigh anybody down with that. You take a huge burden, which is sort of looking at the worst case scenario ... which always happens, you can't have a long tour without somebody having a personal crisis or an illness ... and you just take away that stress and make it work for the whole company.

But also moving it into the technique and skill needed of ... when you take shows into the tour venues, I really appreciate your expertise and knowledge on that. I always think there's one thing ... that you can teach loads of things. You can teach process, you can teach practicalities, you can teach facts, and you can learn a show. But the thing you cannot teach is judgment, and that's where trust comes.

I think you have such great judgment. You have great judgment in the way that you manage a company, but great judgment artistically, and that means the world to me because when I leave you in charge of the show, I have total trust in you.

Laura:

Yeah, it's still going to be the same show when you come back.



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Emma:

Well, it might not be the same show, but your judgment will mean that it's either a similar show or a better show, and I really don't underestimate that.

Laura:

Well, thanks. I appreciate that.

Emma:

[inaudible 00:34:50], Laura Keefe.

Laura:

I think it's ... one, because we're quite similar, but I think also, I'm always aware that it's your work, that it's Malcolm's work, or Etta's work, or other wonderful people that we work with, so I just want to be really respectful for that, and also kind of use the same vocabulary and language that you guys use, as well, so the actors aren't like, "Who's this? We didn't talk about that in rehearsal!" So, just reiterating stuff that we've already done.

Emma:

Which is why it's so vital that you're embedded as an associate right from the beginning of the process, so that you really do know all the team, and know why all those decisions have been made. So that when something changes, you employ all that knowledge, and make great choices, which is where my point about your judgment comes in. Brilliant.

Laura:

Thanks, I'm [inaudible 00:35:36].

Emma:

Come on, let's have another song from Malory Towers. This is the signature song! Let's have a bit of Andrews Sisters, please.

(singing)

We're laughing at how fast it is. We didn't sing it that fast in the show, did we?

Laura:

Well, they wouldn't be able to breathe. They're doing all the dance moves at the same time, I think they were already struggling. Maybe next time that's a spin we can go for.

Emma:

So we were busy remounting Malory Towers for its huge UK tour. We were going to open in Keswick in the lake district, and we'd assembled an almost entirely new cast by two of the original team. We were improving it left, right and center. The show was growing and building. The company was astonishing and had bonded so fiercely.

Every time we came to work, they'd have been in half an hour before us, or an hour before us, practicing the dances, playing together. It was such a tight company, and it was such a powerful excitement in the room at the same time as the COVID story was starting.

We felt, for such a long time, like it wasn't going to affect us. We were in this beautiful place, we were kind of only seeing each other. It felt very impossible to imagine that this virus was going to touch us, and this magic show, and this magic company in this magic place. But it did.

Laura:

Yeah, sadly. Yeah, it was a really strange time, I think, because we were so far away from our homes, and from a big city, and really isolated in this beautiful, beautiful area in the Lake District. And as you said,

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they bonded so well that we were just in this lovely little bubble. It was a joy to come into rehearsals every day. It was only when you went home and switched the news on that any of that kind of seeped into our lives.

I mean, we managed to get to the end of rehearsals, and the set got put up, and I think for a bit we thought we'd get into there and we'd manage to be able to tech it, but it just became apparent that we weren't going to be able to.

Emma:

I think we were one of the last shows in the industry still rehearsing and still standing. We left it until the last minute, didn't we?

Laura:

Yeah, and in that final week, we were all really scared. We obviously had loads of friends that were working on shows, here over on Broadway, and we didn't dare tell them that we were still working, so we thought we were the only company still going. So like, "Ssh, don't tell anyone!"

Emma:

But yeah, we had the secret plan that if we could get the show teched, that it would be ready to go in the future whenever the restrictions ... which at that point, we thought might not last that long. We'd be ready to go.

But I found it really moving. I found that company really moving, and it's continued. So several of you stayed, I think Keswick for some time. How many weeks have you been up there?

Laura:

For five weeks, and it was myself and two of the actors, so Georgia Bruce and Katy Ellis, and we stayed up there for five weeks. There was a few days where some more of the casting company hung around.

Emma:

And that's because for a lot of actors, particularly younger actors, when you're about to embark on a seven month tour, you often give up your accommodation because you don't want to be paying rent in two places. So for a lot of these young actors, they actually didn't know where to go back to when we said, "This is off. We need to start work." So it was really special. And it was special for me, this little house in Keswick, which harbored the Malory Towers girls for a while.

You staged a quiz for us, didn't you?

Laura:

Yeah, we did a Malory Towers quiz. I think it was the first week of lockdown, so we were still very much missing you all and missing our old life. So we did a special Malory Towers quiz that involved a bar, we had a bartender and a bar, and we made ourselves a costume and a backdrop and we did quiz rounds all about Malory Towers.

And I loved that, but the thing that I loved the most, and I was maybe going to choose this song, was that we did a little interval, and when we went on a break, I just thought I'd put some music on just to kind of fill the silence. I think I put Whitney Houston, I Think I Want To Dance With Somebody, and nobody went to the toilet or to go and get a drink. They just stayed and danced their hearts out.

So there were all these images on Zoom of everyone in their houses just going wild dancing.

Emma:

Oh, the dance is an absolute highlight of my lockdown. It was really joyful, and you put so much work into it, you three, it was a really impressive production you put on.

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I was also ... my ego was very pumped, because one of the rounds was about me, which we didn't realize until the end.

Laura:

It was.

Emma:

But then one other thing that makes me laugh is one of the questions which ... and I got a hint. I said to Simon, my partner, "I think the round's about me," so I got the clues and I was answering the questions, because obviously it was about me. And then one of them was, "What's Kim Kardashian famous for?" [crosstalk 00:43:24]

Laura:

And Carol Vorderman and sort of the people, and what awards they won, yeah.

Emma:

And Carol Vorderman. But what I was thinking ... but that would be their bottoms, but I thought, "What's that got to do with me?"

And you were thinking about A Midsummer Night's Dream and bottom, and I thought it was because when I bought a new pair of jeans, you said my bottom looked good in it, and my poor little middle-aged ego thought it was because I had a good ass.

Laura:

I mean, your bottom does look great in those jeans, so it works on both levels.

Emma:

But it made me really laugh there. It didn't cross my mind that it was a Shakespeare reference.

And also, Midsummer Night's Dream is in Malory Towers as well, so as always, the last of the Shakespeare party.

Laura:

Yeah, yeah. I love that you didn't get the Shakespeare one.

Emma:

But thank you, okay, that time in Keswick, we'll all remember it because it was the time that lockdown happened, and our lives changed.

But you were such an amazing person in the middle of that company. You're the glue that held us all together, so thank you for that.

What's your next choice of music and why?

Laura:

My next choice of music is ... I thought I should maybe ... although now [inaudible 00:44:38] knows about it, but I thought I should talk a little bit about my own work and then ... although nowadays I mostly solely work for Wise Children, I still squeeze a few of my own shows in the middle.

So I wanted to play you a song from a show that I made, and it's by an artist called Brigitte Aphrodite, who is probably my most significant collaboration as a director. I worked with Brigitte for about 10 years on and off, and we've made two full-length shows. One of which I made exactly at the same time as Malory Towers last year.

The first one that we made is a show called My Beautiful Black Dog, and it's an autobiographical piece about Brigitte's experience with depression. I think it's the show that I'm the most proud of. It's a

# Wise Children's Tea & Biscuits

## Emma Rice & Laura Keefe

real heart piece. We've made it over many years, I've known many whatsoever, and spent many evenings driving flight cases around, or sticking props together.

I think the work that I make with Brigitte is probably the most representative of me as an artist, and I think working with Brigitte made me consider myself to be an artist as well. She's the outward expression of what's happening internally for me.

She's a feminist showgirl, and we made the show with Quiet Boy, who is her real life partner, and they both perform the show together. So it's, you know what I mean, an insight into someone dealing with depression but also what it's like to live with someone with depression.

It's not depressing, and it's called Creshendorious from My Beautiful Black Dog.

Emma:

(singing)

Absolutely brilliant, Laura.

Laura:

Oh, it's so nice to hear it. And can I do a shout out for them, because they're a struggling artist in lockdown?

So if you want to hear the whole album of My Beautiful Black Dog, you'll find it on Brigitte Aphrodite's Instagram. You can also find Very Quiet Boy on Instagram, who is an incredible musician in his own right. And they're in the market at the moment, living with a fabulous drag queen, and putting loads of art and music out online, so go help the artists out.

Emma:

Done.

Laura:

Yay!

Emma:

So looking beyond lockdown, wherever that might be, we've got adventures ahead of us.

Laura:

We do, we do.

Emma:

So you've been a big part of the school for Wise Children, which is a big part of the company which is where we're training the next generation of ensemble theater makers. And for each place that is paid for, we give a place away. Your expertise in teaching and working with people is really coming to its own with that.

So we've got Wise Children to look forward to, and Wuthering Heights. You're going to be my associate on Wuthering Heights.

Laura:

Yay! Fingers crossed that it happens, and happens soon.

Emma:

Well, I'm touching anything that I can find. I believe it's going to happen, but when it happens is what I don't know.

But it feels really important, and it feels really ready, and I think it's going to feel very right. I think it's got a perfect degree of passion, a perfect degree of anger, and a perfect degree of sort of

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release and also hope, and I think it's going to be exactly what we all want, which is a big fat emotional night out with a sense of hope at the end.

Laura:

Yeah, and I think you've done such an incredible job on the script, because we had a Zoom readthrough recently, didn't we, when we were meant to be doing a workshop, so I said we read it.

I think you've done such an amazing job to get all that massive story and all those characters condensed into a play that makes sense and that you can actually follow who's who, because there's so many different people in it. And also that you found humor in something that's actually quite dark and quite bleak a lot of the time.

Emma:

I'm excited. Well, I've definitely done more work on the script than I would normally do because of lockdown, so it's mended. The process is slightly altered, and it's probably all the better for it, which I'm loathe to admit because of course all I want to do, really, is mess about in a rehearsal room with my mates. But it does work, fine-tuning a script.

Laura:

Yeah, and I think even to sell yourself as a writer, because actually, all the shows that I've done with you, the script is really ready, and there's so much information in it. So we do play and have lots of fun in the rehearsal room, and lots of incredible stuff comes out of that.

But actually, it's because you've spent, often years, kind of honing that script and those ideas, and someone else ... it wouldn't be as wonderful, but definitely someone could take that script and know exactly what they had to do with it because you're such a good writer.

Emma:

Aw.

Laura:

Did you never call yourself?

Emma:

I know, well I struggle with that, I struggle, but thank you. I'll just blush for a bit, and then ...

Tell us about your last choice, and why you've chosen it.

Laura:

I think you're going to kill me.

So I'm really excited about Wuthering Heights. So this song is for Wuthering Heights, because when you first asked me to do it, I started to ... well, I read the book and I started to have a look at TV and film adaptations, and just generally stuff that was inspired by Wuthering Heights. But it turns out that this song is about Wuthering Heights, and it's about Cathy and Heathcliff.

I know also that you don't like the Kate Bush song, so I was thinking [crosstalk 00:54:38] ...

Emma:

That is not true! It's just everybody keeps saying, "Are you going to have the Kate Bush song in it?" And I'm like, "No! No, I'm not going to have Kate Bush in my version of Wuthering Heights!" I've got nothing against the song, it's just not going into my adaptation!

Laura:

Some people might say that's a good trick, but what I've done is I've found you an alternative, and I know Simon Baker is listening, so you're welcome.

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It's It's All Coming Back To Me Now, by Celine Dion, and it's about 10 minutes long, so it's the full version. And as a little side note, I actually went to go watch Celine this year in October, so.

Emma:

Oh, Jesus Christ.

Laura:

But yeah, so this is about Wuthering Heights, and I ... a little trivia, I always thought that Meat Loaf wrote it, but he didn't. Apparently it's some guy called Jim Steinman who wouldn't let Meat Loaf cover it because he said it had to be a woman singing it, so he let Celine do it. And, yeah.

And I love Celine, and so she's mental and fantastic, that's all the ... yeah.

Emma:

Well, thank you for being so romantic cheese and rock, to Tea & Biscuits.

So before we sign off, thank you for spending time with me, thank you for everything, and I want to say thank you.

You're so bloody cool, you're so positive, and amazing energy. Your amazing ability and precision has really inspired and changed my process, and I thank you for your loyalty, your friendship and your vision as well.

Thank you, Laura Keefe. You're the best.

(singing)

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!