

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 285 STEPHENSON ARDERN-SODJE TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Hi, I'm stage and stage's Lin-Manuel Miranda, and you're listening to the Hamilcast.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:00:18] Hello everyone, welcome back to the Hamilcast, I'm Gillian, and today I am joined by Stephenson Ardern-Sodje. Did I say this Sodje right?

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:00:28] Perfect. Yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:00:29] OK. Hi. Hello, how are you? You were an ensemble member of the original London Company of Hamilton. You also played Philip Schuyler, James Reynolds. What am I who am I missing? You played Hamilton.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:00:39] Hamilton. Yeah. Cover, cover him. Cover Laurens/Philip. And I was initially I was an offstage swing standby and then I was in the second in the second season, as we call them over in the second season I was man five. So. Yeah. And I was I was kind of actually this is it's a really nice a nice kind of moment. I joined six months into the original cast, so I wasn't technically technically wasn't an original cast member. But then the first time I met Steph Klemons, I was rehearsing with her and I was like I just offhandedly had said like, well, you know, I'm not kind of original cast. And she was like, hey, you were in the building with the original cast members. Like, you need to own that and take on. And it was such a nice kind of welcoming moment where I was like, yeah, I am an original cast member.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:01:27] That is so nice! Before we go any further, can you tell me your pronouns, please?

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:01:29] Yes, he him.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:01:31] So there's like some stuff happening. So I did a surprise to show day today. I just hung up with Leslie Bowman. Let's tell the listeners like what happened. I said this on Leslie's show, but let's you and I talk about it, so. Yeah. Fella from Hamilton Fans London. The at is at Hamilton fans ldn. And there was this trivia thing that she did like at the top of the pandemic. And so many of you participated and she knows so many of you. And she's very nicely a listener of the pod and asks, you know, do you want to talk to any London

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people? And I said, yes, always. So that was so long ago. But things got crazy. And so a couple of weeks ago, I reached out to like to you Leslie and Sharon Rose. And the original plan was to have like a roundtable and just have all of us virtually for like several episodes and just hang out. Yeah, because you're all amazing and so busy. It became and time zones, it became very clear, like, you know what? I think everyone's just going to have their own their own episode, which I'm thrilled about. I'm happy either way to be talking to all of it

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:02:40] would have been it would have been lovely to chat to the other two guys as well. But it was yeah, it became calendars... We're getting sort of interlinked. And it wasn't wasn't checking out properly, was it?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:02:49] Right. But then we made that decision after the Patreon Peeps submitted their questions for you and Leslie. So I have. Oh, so a lot of Leslie's patreon peep questions are also for you because they thought I was going to be asking them to both of you. Lovely. So, yeah. So that's the story. So what are you doing currently you're doing?

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:03:07] I am the globe at the moment. I'm doing some Shakespeare, which is it's funny. It's it feels kind of very different from like it sounds very different from Hamilton, but actually I feel like it's surprisingly similar, flexes a lot of the same muscles. Yeah. So I'm doing I'm in I'm in three shows at the moment. I'm doing Midsummer Night's Dream, The Tempest and as you like it, amazing. And it's it's something I actually booked just before, just after I left home, just before lockdown happened. So I left Hamilton in January twenty twenty and went immediately from that into rehearsals for The Globe. And we because we're doing three shows, we had four weeks per show rehearsal. So we were it was initially twelve week rehearsal process and we got nine and a half weeks in before shows everywhere were just kind of like closing down and and it became increasingly obvious that we weren't going to be putting a putting on a show. It was kind of crazy. And so we went into lockdown. But one pandemic later, I mean, not that it's completely over, but one pandemic later. We as things started opening up again, we were asked back. So we come back and I because the globe is this open air theater, basically, you know, it's a big circle and there's a hole in the top. And so they've been able to kind of classify themselves as open. And we opened

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eighth of June. We started performing. So I've been doing shows for just under two months now. Um, yeah, it's it's crazy. And we do we have a schedule where it's kind of like Monday could be as you like it. Tuesdays, Tempest Wednesday is Midsummer Night's Dream. And then we also do these things called audience choice, which are it's it's horrible. It's horrible in the in the spirit of Shakespearian players who are supposed to be able to kind of like just jump off the truck somewhere and, you know, and put a show on in Shakespeare's time, you know, they would just have a repertoire of five or six plays that they could they could rotate it well. So we go out on stage and say to the audience at six fifty nine, what show would you like to see Tempest as you like it on Midsummer Night's Dream? And the loudest cheer, all of the props, all the costumes are set out backstage for all three shows. The loudest cheer we run backstage get changed and just stop where the show is at seven o'clock.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:11] So yeah. Is it any different than being a swing and Hamilton

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:05:16] I mean, actually when I when I auditioned for it. They were like, how many parts did you cover in Hamilton and how how many? I was like, I basically learned the show four different times and they were like, Yeah, welcome, come and do fine.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:26] That sounds fantastic and terrifying at the same time.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:05:30] It's both of those things. Yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:31] Yeah. Also so we have a we're drinking a couple of pints virtually.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:05:36] Yes.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:36] So cheers.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:05:37] Cheers.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:38] To that because you were saying that there was a bar. Well also I'm going crazy to show day. I don't know where my brain wants to go. My age is like girl you

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got time. We got plenty of time. Thank you. So but you told me something that will save it. We're going to you got like really amazing news before we started. So

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:05:58] I did indeed. Yes.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:58] So we're raising glass one that you're here, but also congratulations to you. Thank you very, very much. Listeners will let you know. You'll let me know even if we have to jump on real quick to do a little like, hey, I'll be able to let them know. But like, we don't know. I don't want to get anyone in trouble. We don't know when the news is going to be out, but it's good stuff. And I'm excited.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:06:17] I got a call literally two minutes before we were supposed to be recording this. So Gillian was the first person I've told, which is actually so exciting. It's really, really nice. So but yes, everybody else will hopefully hear about it. We don't know when I'm allowed to tell people. And now I feel like we're making out to be something. But it's it's exciting. But we will hopefully be able to tell you the gig.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:06:36] It's a big deal. It's a nice thing. Yes. True, true, true.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:06:39] That's never it's never not a good thing.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:06:41] Right. It's always exciting. It's always if you know, this is a this is a good this is a good day. I'm so honored that you've shared that with me. Is there anyone else you want to call?

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:06:50] It's fine. I'll tell them when I tell them at once. I once I start talking about it, it will be a long thing. So we'll have a conversation this fantastic.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:06:59] So you were saying that you were you're a listener of this podcast, which is always very weird for me to hear.

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Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:07:06] Yeah, I feel, I feel very, I feel a bit like I don't know if you if you watch hot ones that there's a YouTube channel where it's an interview. It's like a celeb interview show. And there's a guy called Shaun Evans who interviews celebrities and he asks them ten questions and they each with each question, they eat a a a hotter and hotter hot wing like a chicken hot wing with a hotter and hotter sauce on. And it's it's like this idea that was they came up with this. They were like, how do you break down the barriers of, like, you know, people being kind of professional and being kind of awkward and insecure and but it's become this kind of thing, which if you if you guys don't want, you should definitely check it out. They they interview kind of like famous like musicians. A Nas X was on there recently when ScarJo was on that promoting Black Widow and like but lots of really interesting people that you wouldn't necessarily think would be on that. But it's amazing because one by one, they all kind of just bright. You know, you hit a point when you eat this wing and it's like they're sweating and they're like crying. But and then Shaun Evans is saying that he eats the wings alongside them, but he's kind of it's like a stomach of steel. But he's he a lot of the people who go on the show, I watch the show and a lot of the conversation is just, God, it feels so weird to be in in the space. And I feel exactly like that now. I'm like, I've heard your voice. I've heard you talking to people who I know and people who I don't know. And now all we hear.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:08:24] It's so nice. Yeah, maybe it's incorporating wings into a podcast is a little tough, but I like the because it's also you can't be like graceful eating a chicken wing.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:08:32] No, no, no.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:08:33] But that's part of the show. I love that. I do. I like that idea of just like if you come to the show, you know exactly what's happening. You're getting messy, you're eating chicken wings. Can people eat all ten? Like, how hot does it get?

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:08:46] You almost always do it. But it is they it's honestly like you have to you have to check it out. It's amazing. There's there's and it's people, people reactions. Some people who you would think react really badly

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don't. And some people who you think would be able to take it absolutely fall apart. It's it's very interesting. Yeah. It's it's a good show.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:09:03] Can you have sips of something in between? That'll be my last question about the...

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:09:07] They have water and they have milk and they're quite they provide for everybody. They give you like if you want almond milk or dairy free alternative. And they also do like for veggies and vegans, they do get your wings or cauliflower like cauliflower wings.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:09:18] And I ask that,

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:09:20] yes, they're very inclusive.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:09:21] So it's all about the hot sauce, really. Can you.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:09:22] Yeah, it's just about it's just about punishing people while they ask them questions. Really.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:09:27] Well, yeah, of course. You're also what we're going to get into Hamilton, but you're also a fellow podcasters. Yes.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:09:34] Yeah, yeah. Yeah I, I am indeed. I have a podcast called Generation veX, which is also with fellow alumni, Sharon Rose, who. Yes, she and I. And another article, Vanessa Fisher, she's about to go into rehearsal, so bring it on, which is getting a UK tour, which also Tommy, I believe Tommy and Lac have had dealings with that as well. I feel like. Yeah, yeah, yes, yeah. Which is good. But yeah, Vanessa and Sharon and I do a podcast called Generation veX where we we interview British writers of color and talk to them about their books and that sort of position in the literary world, which is something we started off. We were kind of talking Sharon and I were talking about starting a book club and basically just kind of enhancing. I'm reading because we feel like, as with lots of people, you read a lot when you're a kid and then often it kind of drops off and it's nice to have a little bit of social pressure to to make you read again. And

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then a friend of mine who's a producer, she's Naomi who works in publishing. I told her about it and she was like, oh, I know lots and lots of people. I could get them on and you could interview them. And we were like we were just thinking about kind of reading in a circle. But, you know, and it turned into this big thing. And now, you know, we interview people, which is really exciting.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:10:46] Yeah, that's a really exciting Idris Elba is involved somehow.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:10:49] Yes. Yeah, it is. So when I first moved to London, I moved to London about 20 end of 2016, and I moved down here to start working. At that point, I of like ties back into the beginning of my story. So maybe if I start telling you, like, my general story, that that can lead us away.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:11:08] I would love that more than anything. I mean, you listen to the pod, you know, my question is going to be like, yeah, what would you tell me your whole life story?

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:11:16] So, yeah, I was I was living in Manchester. I finished finished uni. I'd moved up to Manchester with some friends. And then I didn't really know what I wanted to do. My first my degree is creative writing, English and creative writing. So I was kind of I just wanted to do something writing. And I got a job, an internship, working for Idris' Production Company, which is called Greendale Pictures. And so I moved down to London to work for them. And I worked for them for about a year, working kind of unscripted content. And also just like changing the bins and, you know, filling the coffee machine stuff and doing lots of doing lots of fun stuff. And then I also joined a choir. I was singing in a choir because I like to sing. I like to I did a lot of drama when I was a kid. And then I the choir someone posted it at WhatsApp Group. Oh, Hamilton's having open auditions. And so I was like, oh, cool. And I went to my friend's house. We recorded a one minute video of me singing and a one minute video of me rapping and emailed it off and then forgot all about it. And then I got a call and it was someone from Cameron Macintosh's casting team being like, Hey, we got your video. We'd love to come in here. Three songs. If you could learn them and then come in, that would be great. So I learned these three songs. I came in, I sang these three

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songs, I went away. And then the next day they called me and they were like, I really liked you. We'd like to see you for a swing roll here. Twelve songs you have seven days come back and and sing these 12 songs for us. And I was like, OK, do, can I hold them? Like, you know, can I look at the words when I'm doing it. And they were like, oh no big swing. We need to make sure that you can learn lots of material really quickly. So if you could be off book for all twelve of these songs, that would be great. So I went back to work. I booked a day off. I was like, oh, I've got I've got to go to the doctors. I'm afraid I need this day off next week. And then I, I sat at my computer with headphones and listening to the Hamilton soundtrack while I was doing my office. Busy work for five days. And then I went into to see them and I did things about 45 minutes. It was so it was it was Laurens Phillips material Hamilcast material Laff/Jeff material. Yeah, I think it was those three. And I did that and they called me back again and they were like, here's another six songs. These I learned the Madison Mulligan material and they called me back and again and they were like, here's another couple of songs. I was I was just doing more and more stuff. And then eventually they called me back and they were like, and at this point, I I'm not really a musical at this point. I wasn't really musical theater person. I liked musicals, but I didn't really know much about them. And so they called me back. I had to wait.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:13:48] Oh that is, this is amazing. So just for the people listening at home or wherever you are, you're like you went to college or school for creative writing. You are working in that world, you are at Idris Elbas production company. Yes. You're chatting with friends and you like to sing like how I like to sing like you know. And then you heard about Hamilton auditioning and then you walked in and they immediately were like, learn these twelve songs to be a swing. Now, can you are you a dancer?

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:14:18] No, I've never danced before. I had a few lessons when I was a small child, and by that I mean like three or four ballet lessons when I was about six. And then I was like, I don't want to do this because I'm the only boy here. And it's weird when you're a child and that's your mindset. But I've never really I've never really dance. And I've done you know, I've done a bit of, um, drama, done Little Shop of Horrors at university. I was one half of the plant. We did

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it. We did it. We have two people and but no dancing involved in that, which is nice, but yeah, not really, not really done that much. I've done a bit of barbershop singing a university, but that was about it.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:14:53] So did you know about Hamilton. Like what was it about Hamilton that made you say like I'll audition for that even though I didn't.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:15:00] So when I was in Manchester, I, I did a an American version of Hairspray and I really vividly remember actually I will have to give props to my sister because my sister told me she was like, oh, you should listen to this musical is musical called Hamilton. And I said, this is you know, it was when Hamilton was kind of just coming across from. The US, I think at this point, I would have been maybe 2014, 2015 must be

Gillian Pensavalle [00:15:23] 15, 15 or 16, 15,

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:15:25] 15. Yeah, because that was the year before and we've done so. It would have been the end of 2015. And I listened to it and I was like, yeah, OK, I kind of get it. It's a bit fast. And I didn't really I didn't I wasn't massively into it. But then I did this this drum hairspray and one of the guys that was like, oh, what? Everybody was talking about Hamilton. At this point, everybody was like, it's this big new things, this big new thing and has I got I have to go back and listen to it properly. And he was like, what's your favorite song? And I said, Oh, I don't know. I went back, I listen to it. And I was like, oh, this is pretty cool, actually. So I'd I'd listen to it a bit before I move down, but I didn't really know it that well.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:15:58] And what you're saying, Abderrahim, can you tell the people that means amateur? Is that what that means?

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:16:02] Yeah. Amateur dramatics of the kind of thing that you do with like I was working I was working in a coffee shop, actually, and then just evenings and weekends, I was going with a group of people, you know, like from your local kind of village hall we put on a show. So it was

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you don't get paid or anything. You go you just it's like. Yeah, like an after school club kind of thing.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:16:20] So you're giving so many people so much help. I just wanted you to know this. You weren't the biggest Ham fan at first, right? So you're hearing it. So what made you want to just audition then?

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:16:31] I over time, I kind of got into a bit more. And I like the fact that it was kind of like rap. You know, I'm more of a kind of at that point, I was more of a rap fan than I than like a musical theater fan, although I like musicals. But it was kind of a nice amalgamation of the two and it was something that I felt like I could do. And my friend was like, oh, you should definitely give it a go. So I gave it a go. I sent this video in there, called me and I kept kept auditioning. And then eventually eventually I got an email through and they were like, we're going to have you can have you in had to do a dance round. And that was definitely the point that I thought I was going to go out. It was a Pineapple Studios, which is like this big dance dance studios in London. I think Alex mentioned it on our episode. It's the it's the place that the Spice Girls auditioned, you know, way back where... Yeah. So I went in and Carrie Carrie on who's the associate the associate character on the show. She was there and it was it was really it felt like I'd walked into like fame. You know, there were guys like legs up here and, you know, everybody was stretching very, very kind of competitively stretching, you know, looking at like they've make full contact with you as like sliding into the splits. And you're like, yeah, okay, cool. I can't do that. That's that's not me, But I kind of did the dance around and somehow got through. And then the next day they were like, we're going to call you back again for vocal rounds. I went in front of the vocal. This is maybe around five, six, I think. And then they were like, keep it was a Monday. And they were like, keep the Monday and the Tuesday free because we might call you back on the Tuesday. So they called and they called me back on the Tuesday after the Monday, and they were like his could you also learn the King George song? So this was like my kind of sixteenth number maybe. And also there'll be these there'll be two people in there, a man called Alex and Tommy. And I was like, OK, cool. Yeah. Oh, my God. And I walked into the room and there are these two guys who, you know, who are just sitting opposite me and over the table with all the people

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I've seen so far. And they start talking. They've got American accents now, like hazings. It's so good to see. Thank you for coming in. And I'm like, yeah, great. No idea who they are.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:18:31] Oh, my God.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:18:32] And they were like, you know. So let's just start off with the Hamilton material. So for an hour and ten minutes, I do. I like play through it all. And then there comes a point where I have to do it. King George material, which I've only learned the night before and I'm doing it. And it's it's not like sitting very well. And Alex is like, do you mind if I just come around the piano? So Alex Lac sits at the piano and starts playing it for me. And it's like, you know, can you sing this can you sing this bill

Gillian Pensavalle [00:18:52] so nice

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:18:53] when, you know, it was all it was all kind of okay. And then that was the last round and I left and one of the cameras team came out. They were like, really? Well thank you. Well then as I thanks. I went home and I didn't hear anything about it for two weeks and I was like, oh well I guess that night nothing's come from that. That's fine, but I'll just give him a call and see what's happened. So I called and I was like, OK, I'm guessing I haven't got it, but I just want to say thank you so much. You know, I had a really good time and they were like, oh, actually one of the casting team wanted to speak to you. And they passed me over and they were like, yeah, we really liked you. But we just thought because it's going to be a really tricky show and it's, you know, open soon, it's it's quite hard. And you don't have any experience. We just we just didn't think that it was the right time for you. And I was like, okay, you know, how can you make sense? And they were like, but what are you doing at the moment? We'd love to, like, keep track of you. And I was like, oh, no, no. I work in an office. I, I don't do this and I'll never do this again, but thank you very much. And they were like, oh well that would be a shame. Like would you consider would you consider training? And I was like, yeah, I would, but I haven't got any. I'm getting money and I work full time in London. They were like, oh no, that's fine, we can sort that out. And so they sent me to the Royal Academy of Music to do my master's in musical theater.

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Gillian Pensavalle [00:20:02] Stephenson.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:20:04] Yeah, it was great.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:20:05] But they said, OK, sorry, I have so many. OK, I'm sorry.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:20:10] You know, go go go

Gillian Pensavalle [00:20:13] What was it like as a non. I'm going to call you a non dancer. Yeah, right. Absolutely. OK, I just because you are now clearly but like at the time, what was it like learning that choreography, which is notoriously what it is? Yeah. Yeah. What was that

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:20:30] like? Do you know what I what I will say is I think it's testament to, to Andy and to Steph and also to carry the it was probably the best career I could learn. I think it's the best career you can teach a non dancer because it's all about intention. And the way that Carey taught it was very similar to the way that when eventually and the know stuff is the same, it's the same concepts in the way that they teach us. They don't teach on counts. They don't you know, they're not like five, six, seven, eight, 10. And it's it's all taught to the lyrics. And so, like, they were playing a section of my shop. We were learning in my shot choreo. And it's all about, you know, the reaching. You know, it's I am not throwing away my, you know, and giving you a gift. So as she was talking us through it, it was like, you know, you're reaching out to the people and reaching out to the people here. You know, your your hands on your heart because you're feeling so empowered. You step up and then you've got this kind of like the fancy little hand at the side because you're feeling kind of you really feeling yourself, you know, and then bah bah bah, you do that. And so as a non dancer, but as someone who I feel, you know, my strength is kind of storytelling and my strength is kind of understanding the words. I'm like, well, of course, as soon as you told me that once, I know that the hands of the hands, whereas if it was on counts every time, I'd be like, wait, was that four, five, five, six or so? And and they also have which is much to my benefit, they have a real focus on. We don't care about the like the cleanliness of the move as long as the intention is clear. And I was like, well, I'm not going to

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give you cleanliness, but I'll give you intention. The face will be given. You know, I can dance from the neck up, but I just can't dance from the neck down. And that's that's the thing. So it was it was a it was a lot. It was a lot. But it was it happened. You know, it happened.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:22:02] Oh, God. OK, so that makes so much sense as. Yes, of course, talking having been lucky enough to speak to Steph and Andy and also. Yeah, even there were those famous like Wall Street Journal, the videos of Andy and Steph teaching. They're teaching my shot and Yorktown a little bit. And it is the same. It's like, you know, Andy talking about he loves going to see the Yankees and all of those like baseball moves and all of that. Even as he's describing it, he's not counting. He's told the story. Exactly. That's amazing.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:22:34] So that was that helped.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:23:33] So you're working, you're working with Idris Elba at the time and then they say, we'll send you to school.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:23:41] Yeah. So I'm in I'm in London. I'm working. I mean, I say working with Idris, I was working in his company, but I only saw kind of once a month he was, you know,

Gillian Pensavalle [00:23:47] in and out. I'm just say I'm saying that, you know, because it's it's a fun thing to say you're doing that.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:23:52] It was I mean, he was he was amazing, actually. I so I agreed to go. They basically they said they they the Royal Academy of Music is a school that has a you know, it's a really good conservatoire and as a one year master's in musical theater. So you can kind of train and really get a grounding in musical theater in its entirety rather than kind of just, oh, he can kind of rap, you can kind of sing, he can do this one show and then he'll be stuck forever because he doesn't have the grounding to kind of like work in the industry. So I think they were thinking about me being more of a well-rounded performer by the time I started my career, which was really nice and has has kind of paid off, definitely. So I I actually went to Idris and I wrote an email and said thank you

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so much. And he called me into his office and was like me. It's so nice to, you know that you're doing this and well done. You know, like was if you were really supportive and he actually eventually came to see me play Hamilton, which was like, you know, he really is the most supportive guy and really, really nice.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:24:46] I was going to be my next question. Did you. Was he able to see you on the show?

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:24:48] Yeah. Yeah, he came. He came to see me play. And the whole the whole team came down and it was amazing. Yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:24:53] So you like you can confirm that he's awesome.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:24:56] He's incredible.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:24:57] Because we want it. We need him to be awesome.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:24:59] He's honestly the first time I met him, he just has this first of all, he has this presence like he is just like a celebrity in the nicest sense, the way, you know, when you want something to be larger than life. Like he he walked into the office. He smelled amazing, like my hair out of place, you know, like that. I'm just like, you have access to a. Kind of a kind of like, you know, cologne that normal people just can't buy, like, you smell great. You you look great. Like and he came and he was immediately like, oh, Stevenson, it's so great to meet you. I've been working there for like a month. And he came in and was like, you know, we'd spoken over face time, I think. And so he was like, you know, great to meet you in person, give me a big hug. And it's and it was like, oh, my God. Yeah, he's he's a really good guy.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:25:38] Did you did you watch The Wire? Because that's how I know him.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:25:42] See, I've actually never watched The Wire. It's like I really need to I might my kind of interesting was Luther so that's kind of like my. Yeah. The way I met him first.

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Gillian Pensavalle [00:25:52] Yeah. My thing about the I met him down in Baltimore in the wire. He the thing about the wire is it's phenomenal. Everyone says that. But it's also like you need to watch it on your own time because you can't be on your phone. You have to like sit and watch it.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:26:06] Yeah. Yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:26:06] So I always say, like you, I just going to add my voice to the chorus. You should watch it. But when you on your time there's no pressure and I'm not going to be like I can't believe you knew him and didn't even. But Stringer Bell, I mean, that's his that's one of the best. And I'd be curious, like eventually when you do, let me know, because I'd love to hear you what it's like for you. Who knows who's like a colleague and friend of yours to see him as this character. And I will say no more about.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:26:34] OK, good. I will

Gillian Pensavalle [00:27:24] I can't believe like I truly can't believe that you called them to follow up and they were like, oh yeah, actually while we have you real strange, they totally changed your life, like, I honestly.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:27:35] So I so feel that like if I hadn't made that that call, I don't think they would have followed up, you know, not because they didn't want to, but just because they're busy and things happen. But I don't think they would have necessarily they would have chased it. And it was just this thing of like, let me just they just check because maybe they just maybe they wanted to offer me and they just forgot, you know, for.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:27:52] Sure.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:27:53] Yeah. And so I called and this was this was August bank holiday. So it was like the end of towards the end of August I and the term started in September, like the first week of September. So I, I had to hand in my notice at work. I, I, they let me do one week instead of two weeks work to start everything off. And I still started term a week late. So I got to, I got to school, I got to like the foyer

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and I went up and we have this, there's like a musical theater corridor with lots of lockers. And everybody had all of the company of the year had already been there for a week and they'd really bonded. And I walk through this door, I opened the door and around all of the lockers, everyone pulls out and they go, Oh, my God, you must be Stephenson. And I was like, oh, my God, it's the most musical place I've ever seen. So there was so much I was like, what have I what have I stepped into here? And it was kind of just from there it went, yeah, we, um, we actually we had to start with the end of the first week was when I got there, we had a Friday sing through where everyone had to sing a song from the musical theater rep folder and the only songs I had come to. So so I had to get up in front of everyone I sang Hurricaine and that was then my like it was kind of the thing where they were like, Oh, so you want to be an Hamilton? I was like, yeah, I really do. And I kind of sang it like once a week for the whole year that I was there. That was kind of everyone's like, yeah, he really wants to be in Hamilton.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:29:13] Yeah. And I guess you have to be, I don't know, a little delicate about like well I'm kind of here because of Hamilton.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:29:21] Yeah. Yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:29:22] How do you navigate those conversations.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:29:25] It was, it was well it was, it was kind of nice. There were a few different people on different scholarships. There's a there's the Academy has a Disney scholarship for people of color who are looking to get into the theater industry. And so therefore, it was the first year of the Disney scholarship. And know for Disney scholars, one of whom is Sam Addenda, who is the guy that I went into Hamilton with. So he and I were both there on scholarships. He actually he's a crazy another crazy story. He was singing. He he used to be a professional lawyer and then he was singing in a church on a Sunday. And this woman came up to him and was like, I was reading the Stage magazine. And they have they have this scholarship. And you should really apply for you've got a lovely voice. And he applied. And then similarly next week was at Rame and then we both got pulled in to hang together. So we just just fell in. Really.

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Gillian Pensavalle [00:30:12] That is unbelievable. Just the way like the timing of it all and the just a phone call or a conversation or like a WhatsApp or something to have something just changes everything.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:30:25] Yeah, it's it's really crazy, I think. Yeah. It does make you kind of think, OK, maybe not even right place, right time or fate, but it's about like always taking those chances and just going oh well what's the worst could happen if I follow that lead. What's the worst that can happen if I, you know, try that avenue.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:30:39] Yeah. So you're there and like there is a chance that you would be there and say, I don't want to do this. Like, you could have walked in and said, this isn't for me. Like that could have happened.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:30:50] Yeah. Yeah, well, it was. I mean, I think the thing is, it's it was just so much fun

Gillian Pensavalle [00:30:56] what you're meant to do it. That's the point.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:30:58] Yeah, exactly. That's that was that was a part of me. I mean, because I've always been to the things I'd like to see things. But I come from like a town up in the West Midlands and not near kind of London. So we don't have big you know, we don't have we don't like they brought out Broadway like the West End. We're not near that kind of thing. So we get kind of touring productions or really small shows and things. And you you go and see them. And I think there's I don't know about you, but for me, I think when you're a kid, you see these fully polished productions with these people who are so kind of precise and perfect and you just think that's such a gulf of distance between what you are and what they are, that I never really thought that was a way to bridge that. And I think my you know, my mum was very supportive but has no kind of connection to the creative world. So she would have she would have supported me if I was like, I want to do that. But she wouldn't have known, oh, you should apply to drama school and you probably won't get in and you'll need to do this and you need to go to an acting coach and you know, all these things. So my first kind of my first the first life was just me kind of

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going and doing an English degree because that was the the right path to go. But then when you start working, when I was working a green door, you start to meet celebrities and performers in their off time. And so you realize, you know, oh, OK, that person is amazing in that show or on the stage or in that song. But they're also a person. And you understand that there's kind of a it's it's a thousand steps that get you up that ladder rather than like, oh, they're at the top of the ladder. How do I. We do that, right?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:32:21] Yeah, no one wakes up at the top of the ladder. Yeah, that's not really a thing, I'm sure. Yes. I mean, you know

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:32:28] so some people are closer to the top than others.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:32:30] Collin Hanks, who I love, was it started a couple of rigs up. Yeah, but, you know, so.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:32:39] Yeah. And I think, you know, that kind of broke down that barrier for me bit, which I think was really nice and so necessary, especially for people who don't have industry connections or have like family members who know people who know people who can kind of do that. You you have to find a way to see that everything that's happening on stage, everything that's happening on TV, is the result of a just concerted effort over time rather than this kind of inherent talent that that just did everything for, you know, and talent is is nice, but it's not the be all and end all. And so, yeah, I was I was at Ramos' at school. I was I was training basically five days a week. Most days it was six days a week. They kind of called us in for like on Sundays, most Sundays as well. And we would do in the mornings we would do ballet, tap and jazz or musical theater specific dance. We learn like a kind of like abundance. So you learn like a Fosse, you do something like that. And then in the afternoons you'd have singing lessons and you'd have acting through song lessons, you'd have straight acting lessons and you do all these other bits. And it was kind of just this whirlwind, this whirlwind of time where, yeah, we were all in it and we were all a company. It was really nice. We had a really good time. And and then in halfway through our second term of three terms, Hamilton called and said, Sifso, who is whose Burr at that time , he was covered Burr at that time.

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He then has become he became Burr in second year. He was covered by cover Jefferson cover Hamilton. So a very important linchpin of the show. He was, you know, covid everybody. His wife was about to have a baby and he needed paternity leave. And they were like, we think we need some more covers to kind of balance that out. So we'd love to see Stephenson again and we'd love to see this show, Sam, as well. And we both went in again and started auditioning. So we were like doing doing school in the day and then going and auditioning in the afternoons and basically did the whole process again. So we did another sort of four or five rounds and a dance round, which we were a bit more prepared for this time, which was which was nice. And we actually we we we watched a bootleg of the of the show to prep for the my show choreo. And we were like, OK, we think it's going to be this. And we got in the room and then carry on was like, so I recognize some of you is going to be the same choreographer we've done before. We were like, yes, yes. We suddenly realized it could have been something completely different. Yes, we were a bit more prepared and we we auditioned again. And then they they just said, yeah, we we're ready to have you. So they pull us out early. We didn't we actually didn't do a third term. So our outside and our final grading was on the dress run of of me as Hamilton him as Burr in Hamilton. Our teacher came to see the show and was like, yes, fine, very good. So that was it was a real well. And we were in we were in and out kind of thing.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:35:20] Stephenson I say this with all the love in the world. This story is fucking ridiculous. And yes, it's real.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:35:28] unreal. Yeah. It was very, I think very right place, right time and very kind of things all coming together, even even down to kind of more like systemically people of color becoming, you know, like the show existing. You know, I think it's the kind of thing that couldn't have happened kind of ten years prior and or even sort of like four or five years. It just the show didn't exist and shows like that didn't exist. And I think people taking a chance on people like me with very little formal training, but with the kind of, oh, he can rap a bit, which is something that they don't teach at drama school. So we do need to find someone who can do that before they before we put them in. So I was very, very fortunate.

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Gillian Pensavalle [00:36:03] Yeah, yeah. I'd also be surprised if they're not teaching it in drama school now after.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:36:09] Yeah. That really should be.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:36:11] They should be. Yeah. It's, it's communication. It's telling a story. It's, it's. Yeah. You know they should have been but maybe now they.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:36:19] Well and it's also I think I think actually maybe it's, it's a lot to do with people being afraid of the language when actually was in the language of the word rap, when really musical theater has address it for, you know, as long as we've had Gilbert and Sullivan, you know, major general is referenced in Hamilton and it's like they're the same it's the same concept. It's it's speaking on beats and it's it's using that kind of inflection and tone to kind of to tell a story, isn't it? Yeah. So that musical theater has rap, but I think everybody kind of use it in the same way.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:37:17] My husband Mike loves the the British baking shows, yeah, and I'm just thinking of them, there's always scenes of the people, like kneeling down, looking in the oven to see it because you can't open up, like looking to see if it's true. So I feel like that's Tommy being like, is he done? Like, can we take him? So, yeah, let's talk about you being cast in it that those that conversation who did you call like who was that the first person for that and then just that whole experience.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:37:45] So what happened. I think I was in class at the time and because we didn't have agents, because we hadn't done Agent Showcase yet. So we we our agent was the head of year, Dan Bolling, who was connected to Cameron's office. Who that Cameron is the UK producer. And it was Cameron's team who put me through school in the first place. So so they were kind of in contact with each other. And Dan had called me in about the first audition. And then someone, Katie, who's the company manager, pulled me out of class and took me upstairs. And Dan sat me down and he was like, you know, students and you've got the offer. You're not allowed to tell anyone you and don't tell anyone at school yet because, you know, it's just sort of going through. And so then I had to I

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was like, OK, cool. And he was like, cool. Now go back to tap. And I was like, just go downstairs. And I'm like trying to do my time steps and just like, yeah, it's like it's going to happen. So that was and that was quite a quick turnaround. I think we I think we got the offer and then we had to stay the agent showcase so that we could graduate because it was part of the credits on the course. And then the day after agent showcase, which was on the Monday, the day after, was our first rehearsal at Hamilton. So everybody else that had gone out for drinks after the show has been like we had such a nice time. And Sam and I were like, obviously by this point we told that the rest of our company. But Sam and I were like, we going to go home, go to bed right now? And then, yeah, we went in the next day to start rehearsal.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:39:04] So it was a really nonstop situation. The minute the ball started rolling, it was just

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:39:10] because the show was open by that point. So they were six months in. It was it was end of March. Beginning of April was was our first year, I think the last two weeks of March. We went in and they've been open. They done you know, obviously they've done previews. They were fully open. Everything was kind of running. They'd have their Olivia nominations, which were that's the equivalent of the Tonys. And so that, yeah, we knew at that point the show was really had already kind of hit big. And I think there was that kind of worry initially about the translation of it and whether or not it was going to be huge in the UK. But by this point, we were we were coming into something which was already a mouth. You know, it was really rolling full steam. And we just kind of had to, like, cling on for dear life.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:39:47] Totally. It was nice that you had a friend

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:39:49] Yeah, it was actually I honestly, he and I, he and I really had to, like, hold it together. And we were it was fascinating because I was listening to the Jonathan Groff episodes that he did. And he his experience coming in to the show as it was already kind of fully formed at the public, kind of it felt kind of similar to what we'd done because the cast had already meshed. They knew each other, you know. And so when we came in, Sam came in, I was

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covering MAN five, man six, who were the two less dancey tracks. And I was third cover. Hamilton third cover Laurence Philip. Sam came in. He was also man five and six cover and he was Laff/Jeff Burr and Madison Mulligan cover as well. So between us we covered all the men except for George Washington and we came in and the way that they thought was best to teach us was to teach me Hamilton and teach him because that, you know, the kind of the spines of the show. So we would come in at ten o'clock in the morning and we'd work from ten till five and we'd have a session on vocals with Richard Beadell, who's the associate, and the and he would we said we'd have two hours where we'd start the school and we'd just start singing through and we just sing as much as we could sing in this little room with a piano, with me singing all the Hamilton Lin's and something or Bolen's and then with me singing or the Laurence Philip and he'd and him singing all of the Lac Geoff Lin's. And it was that was really challenging. Sam is a sight reader so he can read harmonies like just off the page, whereas I am I, I've got a good ear. So if I hear I'm kind of okay but I would have to the day before I kind of look at how far I thought we were going to get and I'd listen to the soundtrack and be like, okay, so that's what I'm saying. And that's why I sing. I think that's my harmony. And then we go in and just be like, okay, this is great. And some like reading was so impressive because at one point when we first started, he was in his Burr and Burr and Laff/jeff have very a lot of really close harmonies. And in the U.S. cast, Lesley has a higher voice than David. And so Leslie sings all the top harmonies. But over in the UK, because Jason Pennicuik has a high as his voice sits in a higher place, they swopped like a lot of their harmonies around, so would come in prep to do Burr and all of his harmonies. And then Richard was like, we're actually actually it's different in the UK and sometimes when OK, and just just read the line like completely different. And I was like, yeah, well done. That is very impressive. Yeah. Yeah. That was, that was crazy. So we do that in the morning and then in the afternoon we would work with Carrie on stage and she would teach us the blocking for the bits that we just learned vocally. And so we were learning the show, but there was no one else on stage, it was always just Hamilton, about Hamilton & Burr, about whatever we were doing was just messing about with Kyrie playing George Washington, OK? And it was like so she'd be standing there looking up at me, going. Now you listen to me, son. It was a really good fun.

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Gillian Pensavalle [00:42:34] What a cool thing to picture to see the show strictly in the journey of Hamilton Burr without any of the ensemble members. I remember talking to Jonah Moran, who's the editor of the Hamilfilm and saying like a fun game to play is like, where's Burr? Find Burr because there are times where, you know, in my shot or between Burr, Aaron Burr and my shot, like, he just sort of slinks away. He's not there anymore and he's not singing at the end of my shot. He's mouthing the words, but he's not singing it. So I find it's very I just might my brain went to a place where I could see everything and everything else fades away except Hamilton and Burr to see their interaction and how they cross it when they cross and when they're around and when they're not. That's a cool thing to think about.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:43:15] Yeah, and it really does. It kind of teaches you the how the duality of the show and the fact that that kind of two sides of the same coin and like you said, when one kind of waxes and the other wanes and, you know, at the point at which you realize Hamilton's on the back foot and he's like, oh, you know, you really know that because it's just the two of you. And suddenly Burr is coming out. Yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:43:33] What a cool like, very rare perspective to have as someone in the show, you know. Yeah. Who did you call first?

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:43:39] I must have been my mom. I think I called my mum, but I it's funny. My mum came to see my mum can see one of the shows at the globe recently and our director was like, oh my God, she must have been so happy. You know, it's the birthplace of Shakespeare and it's just really like, you know, and and she also obviously came to see me as Hamilton to come see me as Laurence. But I I tried to explain because she's not because she's not particularly a theatrical person and she's also a very loving parent. She has the exact same amount of of enjoyment and love when she sees me playing Hamilton in Hamilton, as she did when she saw me playing half of the plant in Little Shop of Horrors in a little room in the back of my university, she's like, that's my son. He's the best one on the stage. And everyone else doesn't matter. It's great. I'm loving it. And then she comes in, happens, and I was like, Did you enjoy it? She was like, you were very good.

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Gillian Pensavalle [00:44:23] I love that. Oh, my God. I'm holding my heart. My chest. That is so sweet.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:44:28] Yeah. So she's very supportive, but she she was like, will it be you know, in fact, when I when I left work to go into go back into studying, she was more worried about kind of like you have a job, you're working, you're making money and you're you're taking a step backwards here. And I was like, yeah, I think it's the right move. And she was like, well, if you think it's the right move, do it. But but you do have a job. So, yeah. The reservation, of course.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:44:53] Of course. What was it like rehearsing with Lac after you had this training?

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:44:59] After I knew who he was,

Gillian Pensavalle [00:45:01] you know who he was. But for him, I'm wondering like how what his feedback must have been after him, you know, very sweetly and and his Lac way calling you over, OK, and then you go have this training and now you're, you know, nailing it. He must have been like, fuck yeah.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:45:15] Yeah, well, it was interesting because because by the time I come over Lac and Tommy wasn't there, so I'd go, yeah, I didn't really learn the show with the original, the original team at all. So it was it was with Richard Beedle, with Carrie and with Stephen Whitsun, who was the director. And so I didn't mean we didn't meet them. We met them quite early, but very, very briefly. So when we joined it was the end of March, beginning of April and early April is the Olivier Belavia show. You know, they like the awards. And so we arrived and our second week of rehearsals was was the first time we met Lac because Lac was over doing a tune up on Alexander Hamilton, the opening number four for the team. And obviously stuff was blocking the show for the Olivier stage. I don't know if you've seen the performance, but, you know, of course, on and off course. And so so it was kind of so that was the first time. In fact, what happened was Rich Simon. I was downstairs with Richard doing a doing a vocal call and he was like, right, I'm going to take you upstairs. Now, all of the cast is on stage. They're having a vocal call with Lac. So you're going to meet the cast, like, properly. You know, we kind

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of met in passing in the corridors and things, but we hadn't really had our intro. So Ritchie came up, took us on stage, everybody sitting there looking very nice, very intimidating. And he's like, this is Simon Stephenson, the new cast members like say hi, everybody, like I. And then we sat in the back and Lac is playing through I Hamilton. And he's like, OK, I'll just let me hear this, you know, and obviously it's at highs and I see Boys Alto's let me hear your line and that's just sitting very casually normal clothes. I just sing this line out and you're like, oh that sounds great. And he's like right OK. Now you know Tenancingo this like you know what, let me hear you do this like and then and then he was like, right now everybody put it together and Sam and I were just sitting and we just had this little front row seat to essentially the sitzprobe of the vocals for this opening number of the song. And it was like it was so like resonant and, you know, on the stage as well. And it was just it just like went through your body. And we were like, we are a part of this now. We are part of this. We're in this. And, you know, and like I said, the machine was well underway. Everybody knew that Lin's everybody knew the harmonies. Everyone was kind of so. And they were having fun, they were laughing with each other and we were just like, yeah, this is going to be good, this is going to be fun.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:47:24] Yeah, another musical. I think I'm going to like it here from Annie. Yeah. Just like I can do this. When did you see the show?

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:47:32] I had a ticket for like maybe July of that of the year of 20. It must have, yeah. I think. Got a ticket for July 2017

Gillian Pensavalle [00:47:41] on your own like that. You just got to take because you want to see the show

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:47:44] with a few friends. Yeah. This is pretty this is pretty going into the audition or anything.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:47:48] OK, just want to make sure the timeline was got.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:47:50] Yeah. And then I had a friend who had an earlier ticket and I messaged him when I started

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auditioning and I was like, will you swap your ticket with me so I can go and see the show that I'm auditioning for because I have no idea what it looks like. You know, I've seen a couple of little clips online of, like the Tony performance and things like that, but I haven't I don't know what the show looks like. I know what it's like and I've heard the soundtrack. But I just need to know the vibe is and he was like, yeah, great. So we swapped tickets and I went to see the show during my second audition phase because that was when it was open. Yeah. So it was while I was while I was training, I still haven't seen the show and I went to see the show and I remember saying we were, I was way up in the gods but it was, it was just as mind blowing then as it is still now, you know, and you see it and you just see all of the choreo, all of the lighting, all of the movement and the unity of it. And I was like, oh, this is what this is, OK? Like, it's it's it's huge. It's it's really, really big, you know? And yeah, I can really vividly remember just sitting in it and being like, wow, this is this is masterful. And it felt exactly like the shows that I'd seen when I was a little kid where that's where, you know, where you look on stage, you see these polished performers. But I felt so much closer because I started to have that ability to be like, OK, well, I know that if you learn the lines, eventually the harmonies will stick in and you do this. And you just said it was just kind of I was inching closer to being like I could be on that stage.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:49:09] Oh, yeah. I love that. I love that. That was your feeling like. Yeah, I could I can do this.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:49:15] Yeah, it was, it was I think it was really nice because it could have felt kind of insurmountable, but it did, it felt like this is this is manageable. It's going to be hard but it's but it's manageable

Gillian Pensavalle [00:49:23] and it lit a fire under you.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:49:26] I mean there were moments that was there were moments definitely during training where I was like, God, if I don't get the show, I will be very, very sad because it kind of felt like it was moving along. Yeah, exactly. But, you know, it all came together.

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Gillian Pensavalle [00:49:38] That's an insane story. So then, OK, so you're meeting, you know, the Sitzprobe for vocals, which is unreal. And you meet everybody. And was it that same like, hi, you must be kids. What was it like walking in to the show?

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:49:52] Yeah, it was kind of like it was kind of like that, I guess. I think maybe that the Hamilton cast a little cooler, little stinkier than like your traditional seventy kids. But they, they were what I think was really fascinating was how gelled they were. And I think Sam and I found that quite intimidating at first because you know, it was such an easy and there was such a low in jokes and there were kind of you could see the different personality types, you could see, you know, somebody was really, really like, oh, we need to be strict about the harmonies. Someone else was kind of like, oh, we're just having fun. But they it felt like, you know, really did feel like a family and it felt like we were like, oh, where were we going to fit in this family and how do we kind of like make our way in? And it was it was very interesting. And I think something that I noticed I didn't notice initially, but I noticed as it went along is that there were there were two different kinds of like two two different kinds of performers in the show. And for me, it kind of splits into dancers are people who are dance first and people who are kind of singing first. And I said this, I said this is which I just found so funny was dancers speak a different language. And I and I have never been more aware of it than I'm how much on stage they would you would see someone like like Jack and Jack and Leslie would be like dancing in warm up together and Jack would do something like they can tell a joke with their bodies. Yes. And I'm like, like to like Jack would do like a pirouette, but he would like have his Lac turned out when it's supposed to be turned in and everyone like the dance we watch and they would like crack up, they'd be like, oh my God, I can't believe

Gillian Pensavalle [00:51:14] you did that.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:51:15] And I'm like, what is happening? Like, that's not funny. It's not even it's not even decipherable. It's like, yeah, you've done since you were like five years old. And of course, there's what has meaning is literally a story like it's so fascinating to watch. And I was like, yeah, I there's something I need to penetrate there. That's yes. That's tricky.

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Gillian Pensavalle [00:51:35] Yeah. And then Leslie can respond like they can exact the whole conversation. Yes.

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:51:40] It's it's fascinating. Yeah. It really, really is. And then similarly you have then you have the guys who are kind of like watching Giles Prep was something that I was like, you know, a masterclass in specificity and he would come on. And he had like his opening moves. He would like he would work through them in a way, you know, just to make sure that they were exactly where they need to be. And you're just watching and you're like God. Specific words are specific, like phrases like he would go over and, you know, so many people in in in the cars were doing it. And you're just like, this is exactly what it was. This is this is the incremental steps that gets you to that place where when you watch the whole show, you go, this is it's impossible that this has happened. And, you know, it just takes it just takes a thousand steps.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:52:19] Have you read Giles book?

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:52:21] I actually haven't read it yet. No, I know, I know.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:52:25] It's just it's exactly what you're saying. It's just his attention to detail and words and it's just how he preps for for every show. Just little things like how the costume would help him get into it. And he would just he discovered that Burr has this little tic where he always wants to, like, fix his left wrist, like he wants to fix that, you know, the the costume or whatever little things, or that he would sort of lean into one side of his hip that like Giles doesn't do. But yeah. Yeah. Burr that's where. So everything you're saying, it's just it feels so familiar. Just because I spent so much time with with Giles and his book and just a short amount of time, I read the book in two settings. It's phenomenal. And then talk to him for three hours about it right away. So I just feel very like that. Familiar. Yeah, connected. So what was it like? OK, so you meet and then what's it like to go into that life of you used to do this thing for fun after work and now there are like rules and there's like union stuff. And there's it's a whole it must must have been a complete day and night experience for you.

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Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:53:32] Yeah. I you know, I suppose because I came to a little bit later, I'm, I'm thirty now and I did it when I started Ram when I was twenty six. Twenty seven. Just ten, twenty seven. And, and I think I've, I've lived, you know, I've worked in lots of different jobs, I worked in office jobs, I've got some retail jobs and I've done kind of things where every job has good elements and bad elements. And going into this show and working in the theater in general, it just all struck me as so much better than any job I'd ever done before that I was like, whatever kind of comes with it, you know, baggage wise. And there's not that much things like things like sort of equity, the union, you know, signing up and getting an equity card or like getting up and having to go to rehearsals every moment. I just like I could be doing a nine to five. I could be doing, you know, something that I that I that doesn't use me physically and spiritually and mentally in the way that this does. And I have done those things, you know, I've done jobs I really like and I've also done jobs that I kind of like. I used to work at Waterstones, which is I like a big bookstore here, like a Barnes Barnes Noble maybe. But like just said and I loved working there and I loved like selling books, but it was a kind of a minimum wage retail job. And you're like, OK, I can't do this forever because there's no progression. I've worked in an office where I was earning reasonable money, but it was cold calling businesses and trying to sell them things they didn't want. And so I was like this. I could do this, but it will make me very sad. And and then I suddenly had found this job that kind of, you know, supported me and it challenged me and it tested me. And also it's not just anything. It's a job. It's the first year of Hamilton. So, you know, the it was just it was just crazy. Yes. It was amazing.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:55:09] It fed you in a way. Yes. That you needed

Stephenson Ardern-Sodje [00:55:11] Yeah. I brought my I brought my my Hamilton my the wrong China because I was going to show you when I when I started the show, I was like highlighting paragraphs of different like Pink is Hamilton and then Green is is historical. And then blue is is like Laurence Philip. Because I was like I was like I was learning so much stuff and I was going through and being like, oh, so, you know, and it really was it was like going back to school because you kind of have to learn for the characters. And that was really fulfilling. And

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yeah, it's it feels like it's the kind of it's the thing I should be doing, I suppose.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:55:55] If you don't think we're diving into those notes, you have another thing coming that's coming your way in Episode two, along with the story of how Stephenson made his professional Westend debut as Hamilton in Hamilton. Plus, backstage antics and setting some West and prank record straight. All right. That's it for me. We'll be back next week. So until then, stay safe. Stay healthy. I love you. Thanks so much for listening. I'm G.Pen .

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