

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 295 MARCUS CHOI 1 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 am Gillian. Today, tonight, I should say I am joined virtually by Marcus Choi of Hamilton's Philip Company. Hi, Marcus

Marcus Choi [00:00:31] What's up! Are you guys doing?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:00:32] Can you just tell me your pronouns, please? Before we get started?

Marcus Choi [00:00:35] My pronouns are he him

Gillian Pensavalle [00:00:37] Thank you so much. Well, your excellency, sir, because I am in the presence of a George Washington. Thank you so much for being here, joining me

Marcus Choi [00:00:49] You know, I know, I know that you have such a long history with he who will not be named. Oh, no. Well, you know, it's just like I know know with Nik, and I know that you

Gillian Pensavalle [00:01:04] Nik Walker

Marcus Choi [00:01:05] and you know, I just remember him always talking about the Hamilcast and Hamilcast, and I was like, Oh, man, wasn't going to be my turn. Three years later, here I am

Gillian Pensavalle [00:01:17] with the, you know, now that everything is virtual. Yeah, he's here. Yeah. You know, I saw definitely the villain in our history just the other day. He's a fantastic show called Aint Too Proud. I don't know what they what they're doing, putting him at the front of it.

Marcus Choi [00:01:32] I hear he's all right. It's weird.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:01:35] It is. That show is so good and he is so good. And so everyone on stage is just like, Oh my god, oh my God, he's so good.

Marcus Choi [00:01:42] You know, the thing about Nik is the thing that like drives me crazy is that he's always like, I'm not a dancer. I can't dance. Hello. Do we all see the Tony Awards? I know.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:01:52] I know. It's his favorite line.

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Marcus Choi [00:01:53] That dude was killing it. Yeah. No. Nik Walker can dance. I don't care what he says. He can dance.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:02:01] He can totally dance. I was in the third row for a too proud. I watched him dance for two and a half hours last week. He can do it. And I remember, Oh my God. Time doesn't make any sense. Was it last Thanksgiving or the no, it was the Thanksgiving two Thanksgivings ago? I think he said. Yeah, when he was still on tour with Hamilton, he sent me and Mike because we have a group text, a video of him in rehearsals for Ain't too proud.

Marcus Choi [00:02:22] Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I remember when he was rehearsing for that

Gillian Pensavalle [00:02:25] And I was like, You're a dancer. Like, You can't like. That's just that is just a bit. Now that is just a joke, you say, because I mean, you can dance, Nick. And I know he's he's hating every second of it. And you know what good is this? You know, every episode is just like the Nick Walker show, so forget him for coronavirus. Get back to us, right? Do we have a California cab? That's your favorite. We have.

[00:02:47] We do.

[00:02:48] Little bit of red wine?

Marcus Choi [00:02:49] I just pick this one up. It's Joseph Carr from Paso Robles.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:02:53] Oh, amazing. I thought I would say, you know, are you ready for a cabernet meeting?

Marcus Choi [00:02:57] I am ready for a... Well, you know, I thought it was appropriate because, you know, he has a a glass of wine in the office and in act two, you know? So, yeah, so you know, wine, wine, it is

Gillian Pensavalle [00:03:10] so hot, Marcus. Relax, have a drink with me. Yes, exactly. To get,

Marcus Choi [00:03:14] yeah, we're going to take a break. Yeah, yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:03:17] You know, we can't have all night. We could do it very early. So how are you? I mean, you're recently back

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on tour. Just tell me, like, how you are what that's been like. It's so new still

Marcus Choi [00:03:29] yeah. Yeah, it's it's exhausting. You know, I'm so thankful and grateful to be back working again and and and just doing the thing. But, you know, like after we started rehearsals, we were in rehearsals for four weeks and then and then we just like shot right out of a cannon back on stage. And it was, uh, we opened on a Sunday. I think we had like an invited dress on Sunday, and then our official opening was on Tuesday or something like that.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:04:01] OK.

Marcus Choi [00:04:01] And um, it was too. It was Tuesday. I was about to enter the stage and I just I was standing there and I'm like, I'm exhausted. It's I forgot how hard it was to do Hamilton. And and I, you know, I say this all the time, like Chris Jackson crafted a genius track in George Washington. You know, it's just like he has intimate, amazing moments as his entrance is the best entrance I've ever seen on stage ever. Yeah. And then he has like one of the highlights in his farewell speech in Act two and forty minutes into Act two. Basically, your responsibility is done. So like, even though I know that it's it's a bit of like a less physically challenging track, that first show back, I was like, I am so tired. I was like, I, I wanted this right? I wanted to come back, right?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:05] Well, it's also what you went through emotionally, what you went through.

Marcus Choi [00:05:08] Sure, sure.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:10] And then it's like, you kind of, yeah, you want it, but you I think you do forget that it is two and a half hours of just like. It's emotionally draining journey and also like, we're all just we're still in it, like we're not even going we. It's not like, Oh, we've really all been through it. No, we're still going through it.

Marcus Choi [00:05:25] Yeah, yeah. And you know, the the great thing about our rehearsal process, and it was a very cathartic process as well. There was a lot of healing that happened. We would start the day off. I don't I don't know if you had heard anything about this, but we, the Hamilton Company hired this, this like healer. She was, you know, the old, you know, Broadway girl been in a ton of shows. She's an amazing performer, but she's transitioned into healing, you know, and movement and yoga and. And so she would basically guide us through

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a physical, warm up of mental warm up, like an emotional warm up at the beginning of each day. And it was just so helpful and just thoughtful, you know, to to be able to kind of go through that process every day because it's it's not easy to be thrust back into musical theater in 2021. because musical theater 2021 is different than 2019. Many things have happened. The landscape has changed for the better in many ways. And I think people are still still dealing with that. You know, we're still transitioning and we're still learning and. And I think for everybody to be given the chance to kind of start the process together, but thoughtfully from a place of healing and love and trust. I thought that was very, very important and thoughtful for for the Hamilton Company to do for all of its cast.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:07:15] I mean, what were your thoughts going back in to the show? I mean, so many people were saying, I'm not going back until this year and I go back to work at all. Not just Hamilton, you know, right? You know, as an audience member, we were thinking, how do we feel comfortable giving our hard earned money to the institution? That's like not doing great? So what was your perspective?

Marcus Choi [00:07:37] Well, you know, everybody is certainly entitled to their feelings and their thoughts, and I feel like everybody's experience is different. And they are they're definitely validated in and in the in their experience and how they feel towards returning to work. I personally really look forward to coming back to work. I just, I guess for me because I was on tour, it just like it was, it was everything. It was like my world, right? It's not like I was just living in L.A. or living in New York, you know, being able to audition while working at night and whatnot. But, you know, since we're kind of out here on Phillip Island, it's all we had. You know what I mean? And so, you know, I struggle with, like, you know, putting my identity into the show because that's, you know, that was my world. But like, it's kind of hard to avoid when you're traveling with your show and you're in this little tiny family of cast members, you know, and you're working with these people living with these people and. And so, you know, it was it was hard to kind of separate yourself from from the identity of Hamilton. Right. And so, you know, during pandemic, I just kind of got a chance to unplug and just relax. It was a break that I needed, you know, but coming back to work, it was definitely something that I I was looking forward to. And then I just really I really wanted to get back to doing the show.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:09:21] Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, you have been acting and performing professionally for like 25 years. I mean, you are, you know, Broadway credits. I'm just going to let some of them

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Miss Saigon allegiance, wicked times, they are a-changin. Sweet Charity Flower Drums on your TV movie credits. Luke Cage, The Agents of Shield Homeland Bull Speaking of Chris Jackson, now not one, but two Sharknado movies. And so I would love to hear like, I want to hear your whole Hamilton journey, but I also I really also just want to hear about, like your Marcus journey, how you went from, like where you're from, born and raised, and how you just decided, like, this is what I want to do with my life.

Marcus Choi [00:10:04] Sure. Yeah, I grew up in in a traveling circus, and

Gillian Pensavalle [00:10:10] it's called the Philip Company

Marcus Choi [00:10:14] Carny folk we are. We all kind of know each other. You know, it was, you know, my OK, well, let me start off with the Hamilton story. I I auditioned for the show. I want to see in 2017 for the Chicago company. And I didn't get it. I it was I went through a series of like, maybe like two callbacks. But excuses aside, I didn't get it and then cut to like, I don't know, 10 months later, I get a call from my agent and he's like, Hey, they want to, they want to see you for the Philip company. I was like, OK, great. They want to see Washington. I was like, Oh, really? Because the first time around I had, I read for four Hamilton and Burr and and so they yeah, yeah, they want to see evil for Washington. I was like, Yeah, OK, cool. So I learn all the material. I go when I do it and they're like, Great, come back on this day, you know, the creative team will be here. So Alex came in and I got some notes from from Tommy. So we were going over the material. Uh, and Lac and I, we go way back because we did wicked together, you know? And um yeah, he was. He was our our keys too in the pit. And, you know, I've known him forever and it's just like, we always have a great, great relationship. And so he was like, I could come over to the piano. So we're going over one last time and he's, you know, he's giving me kind of like alternate licks and, you know, different melody lines. He's like, I'll try this and it's like, Oh, we'll try. What does this sound like? And he's like, Oh, no, I'll do this. And it was kind of finessing my own pass through one last time. Oh, wow. And I'm thinking of myself and I'm like, Oh, this wouldn't. This wouldn't be happening if they weren't considering me, right? I was like, OK, great. So I do it. Awesome. I think I'm like, I left everything on the table. Like, there wasn't anything else like, I feel like I could physically do I. I sang one last time, probably about 10 times. So I was like, I can't sing anymore. I literally have no voice in

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Gillian Pensavalle [00:12:31] that one meeting. You went through with that many times?

Marcus Choi [00:12:34] Oh yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:12:36] Wow.

Marcus Choi [00:12:37] Yeah. And then, uh. And so then like two days later or the next day, I get a call and they're like, they just want to see you again after you kind of worked on the notes. I was like, OK, great. So I go in, I do all the all the stuff that we'd worked on, and then 30 minutes later, I get a phone call like, they want you.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:12:58] What?

Marcus Choi [00:12:59] I was like. Amazing. Yeah, it was it for for me, it happened. It happened pretty, pretty quick, I guess, because I've heard stories of people auditioning for the show over 30 times. Oh yeah, for your course of years. Yeah, yeah. So I say, you know, I was very fortunate in how they kind of expedite the process, whereas some people just audition once again.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:13:24] Right, right. Were you a fan of the show? I mean, knowing Lac, like, did you have any experience with with heights? Like where did you kind of know what was brewing?

Marcus Choi [00:13:31] Sure. Yeah. So in 2015, I did Allegiance and um, we opened the same season as Hamilton and everything was about Hamilton. So of course, I was familiar with it. I was, you know, like Lin, and I kind of came up on Broadway at the same time. You know, I'm a little bit older than years, and so I was probably there like a little bit before him. But like we were, we were all around in the same circle at that time, you know? And um, when they were down at the public, a bunch of my friends and colleagues had seen it and they're like, You, you need to do this. You need to be seen for it. You need to do this because coming from the dance world, um, I think when I first came to New York, what kind of separated me, I guess in my uniqueness as a dancer was not only my ethnicity, but like also, I could do technique and jazz and musical theater. I could sing. But I grew up dancing in L.A., so I had an element of like commercial hip hop and, you know, popping and locking and stuff like that. And so I was always able to kind of infuse a little bit of a um, kind of like a just like a like a harder kind of style of jazz. Or I would always try to infuse some some version of hip hop to make it more unique. Mm-Hmm. You know, to to my choices of whatever. And so because, you know, all the friends that I had started dancing with back in the early 2000s,

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they're all kind of like choreographers and directors and in casting and producing. Now, because we're all older, they're like, you need it, you need to see this like people calling me out of the woodwork. And I was like, OK, I got to see it. And so, you know, when allegiance closed, I had it and I was there was like a there was like a night over at, Oh, what was that? Get on your feet,.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:15:36] On your feet,.

Marcus Choi [00:15:36] On your feet, on your feet. Yeah, yeah. So, you know, there's a lot of Hamilton kind of crossover family there with In The Heights also, and they're having they had like a like a Saturday night party like every week or something like that. And so everybody from the the community would kind of hang out in the green room and have drinks and hang out. And so I went and I remember Lac was I was like, Hey, what's up? And so, you know, it was good to see him and and I asked him, Hey, you know, I would love to come see the show. Can I hit you up for tickets? And I was like, Dude, just absolutely send me an email. Blah blah blah. So I got a chance to come see the show. Like I want to say, it was like January, February, February of 16. So this was right before Tony season, so the original cast was still there. And um, and before I knew I was going to go see the show, so I was just like, I finally done with the album and it was just like it was one of those things. As soon as a press play on the album, I was like, Oh my god, yeah, this is genius genius.

Marcus Choi [00:17:02] in every song, even though I'd never seen the show. Every song created such a vivid image in my head that like I was like, Oh my God, I got to see it. I got to see it. I got to do it, you know? So I went to see it. I'm just in tears the whole time. Like this, you know, as many people do when they see it for the first time. And so, yeah, it was it was one of those things where, you know, it was a process. And after that first time, I had auditioned for it and I didn't get it. I was like, You know what? This is not in the cards. For me, it's fine. And then when they called again, I was like, OK, well, I guess it's not over. And they ended up getting it. And you know, and I was on tour for two years before everything the world ended.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:17:51] Right, right. It's funny that you and I had almost the same journey in that timeline because this podcast started in January of 2016 at the very, very end of January. So we were both listening to the album January. I think at the same time, something needs to walk in the streets

Marcus Choi [00:18:08] of New York just like,

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Gillian Pensavalle [00:18:10] Look, I got I heard it once on NPR and I got new head. As I was listening to it, I ordered new headphones because I was like, These little earbuds are not going to work like, I need some real cans here. Yeah, yeah. Is this going to be in my ears constantly and I need to hear absolutely everything about it

Marcus Choi [00:18:27] Yeah, yeah. And you know, what's so funny is like when I first listen to the to the album and then watch the show, my initial like connection was Lafayette/Jefferson. I was like, I say, I dance. And I, of course, like, That's that's what I should. That's what I should audition for. And then when I when I went into the room, Beth was just like, Everybody wants to do Lafayette/Jefferson. I'm like, Whoa. I mean, why not? You know, he's the peacock of this show. You know, and and and she's like, Well, yeah, yeah, you can learn that material, but I see you more as this and this. I was like, OK. So ultimately, I'm I'm glad it didn't work out the way I thought it was because it takes a lot of energy to do that part. Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah. And I feel like for the longevity of doing the show, I just I wouldn't have lasted. You know what I mean?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:19:33] Yeah, I mean what when they said Washington, like what was going through your mind when they first you were going for a Hamilton and Burr and then now Washington's on the table?

Marcus Choi [00:19:43] Yeah, it honestly, I don't know what to think. I thought it must be a young cast. You know, they're going to bring me in for watching. And I was like, OK, cool. You know, whatever. And it's so funny because, you know, we've we've talked with like Patrick Vassell in the past about about the Philip company. And, you know, we were kind of like the afterthought, right, where you have the Broadway company and then you had Chicago, which they really, really focused on because this was like the first copy. Right? So they put a lot of attention on that 'cause they scrutinized every moment and audition and the rehearsal process. And and I heard that like it was, it was a struggle. And then they also had the Angelica company. It was like the first tour. And at that point, they had gone through the process so many times that they were just like, Oh, OK, well, let's just cast another tour so they throw together the Philip company. And I think I literally think they just like cast us and just like threw us up against the wall and see if we stuck.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:20:54] I was going to say it and they shot you all out of a cannon right here right now.

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Marcus Choi [00:20:58] And and I don't know, I assume that it was unintentional, but they hired a bunch of people who really got along.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:21:09] Oh, yeah, yeah.

Marcus Choi [00:21:10] And in that was the best thing that we could have asked for, because in a lot of ways, you know, none of us are like, really, you know, shiny actors. You know what I mean? Mm-Hmm. Like, there was no like marquee name. There was nobody who had done the show as a principal in another company like JoMo came from Chicago, but he was a cover, right? And so we were all kind of starting off, you know, as as like a band of misfits, you know, and and when we when we. Gotten to the room and started rehearsals, everybody clicked immediately, immediately, so I mean, I was really fortunate with that process and then, you know, it kind of goes to show like, we're all so super close, you know, like there's a text chain of all the guys and we talk literally, literally every single day.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:22:08] I mean, I've spoken to so many of you, you all say the exact same thing that it was sort of this lightning in a bottle and it doesn't make sense, but it made all the sense in the world and that you're still so close and you all love each other. And it was. It's a different. I mean, I think every time you're in a show with people, you're in the trenches together, but now it's like you're on tour that, OK, that's another another bonding thing. It's Hamilton. That's another bonding thing. And the stars aligned and you're all just of that same energy. And you're I mean, the Philip company is like, you're infamous. You know, you're like,.

Marcus Choi [00:22:41] Are we.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:22:42] Rambunctious? Yes. I mean, the stories that come out of it and everyone kind of knows like, Oh yeah, like, that's the party company. Like, that's the party to the Philip crew. Like, you guys are just pranking each other left and right. You're just like the party animal.

Marcus Choi [00:22:57] Yeah, we like to have a good time. Yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:23:03] So I just I love I just love that every time it comes up, it's just validated more and more that it really is just like it is that fun. You see the Sons of Liberty, like, that's real. The Schuyler Sisters. That's all real. It's all real, and it's real on every stage. But there's something about the Philip tour that's like, Yeah, you know,

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Marcus Choi [00:23:19] I do also have to admit that like, I feel like we've done a pretty good job of maintaining that, that the essence of of where Philip Co. started with every new version of new hires or new people who come and do the show, you know? And you know, of course, it's just natural. It's just the chemistry and the connections are all going to kind of change. But as far as you know, the essence of our group, I think we've done a pretty good job of maintaining that as a family, you know?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:23:50] Yeah, I mean, that's what it feels like to us on the outside, for sure.

Marcus Choi [00:23:55] Hmm. Cool. Cool. I love that.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:23:57] Let's go back, father. Tell me about yes. Yes, you know how you grew up and you're a dancer. Like, just tell me that whole like what led you to Hamilton and everything? Yeah.

Marcus Choi [00:24:05] Should we have a glass of wine first? Absolutely. Let's do it. Let's do it. I'm going to. I'm going to go grab a glass real quick.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:24:11] Okay, me too.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:24:35] Well, cheers, thank you. Cheers on this, this little program, yes, of course.

Marcus Choi [00:24:40] Of course,

Gillian Pensavalle [00:24:40] I love that you're like, Oh my entire life story. Let's let's grab a drink.

Marcus Choi [00:24:44] Let's get. We need some wine for this.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:24:45] Yeah, let's do it.

Marcus Choi [00:24:47] So as a young boy. 1993.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:24:52] Yes.

Marcus Choi [00:24:52] No. I I you know, I grew up like singing in church and, you know, doing like church skits and stuff like that, but never really like took classes or took acting seriously and never really realized that this was something that I wanted to do until pretty. I wouldn't say late, but in high school, I don't know if this

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applies to all immigrants, but I'm just going to make this broad assumption. I feel like the key to success for an immigrant family or immigrant parents that they want to instill into their children is the best way you're going to succeed is through education, go to school, get a good job, get a degree. You know, that's the the path to success. And for many. Absolutely. But I was always kind of different. I don't know. My parents just thought I was really active and just like excitable, but I always made them laugh. So they're like, Oh, he's he's just fun.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:26:00] And where are your parents from.

Marcus Choi [00:26:01] Korea

Marcus Choi [00:26:03] Yeah. And so, yeah, it just it was just like this thing kind of growing up that I just enjoyed being in front of people but never really took it seriously. And then my sophomore year of high school, I auditioned for the Musical. I was taking drama classes and I'm like, you know, it's just it's just fun. It was just an elective. And a buddy of mine that I played football with. He was like, Hey, the musical is going to be auditioning this spring. You should audition or, you know, you should just try out. I was like, Really? It's like, Yeah, I think you'd be great at it. I was like, OK, so I audition and I get it and I get the lead. What is it? Oh, it was. It was once upon a mattress. I played Dauntless and it was like, it was awesome. I had white parents, you know, like the king of the Queen, right? You know, and and it was just like this thing where my my drama teacher at the time, who I'm still very, very good friends with and very close with she she was just like, I don't care that you're Asian, you, you're going to do this role because I think you're the best person for it. I was like, Oh, OK, OK, cool, cool, cool. And so when we started rehearsals, I just realized I was picking up choreography and I was learning direction, and I just felt like I was picking it up faster than people that had been doing it for a long time. And I'm like, Huh, maybe there's something to this. I don't know. So I try out for the fall play the next year and then the next year musical was Guys and Dolls, and I auditioned for that night. I play Sky Masterson and and I'm like, You know what? I think that this is this is something that I need to do like. Before that, I want it to be like a marine biologist and, you know, study the ocean because I grew up in California and I love the beach, and I just

Gillian Pensavalle [00:28:05] that was one of my things to a marine. It was there. It's yeah, I just, ah, archeologist or

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Marcus Choi [00:28:11] yeah, it was. It was always so fascinating to me, you know, and I still I still love the ocean and an inch 'cause I can get to see like a new planet earth, you know, but all over it. Totally. But yeah, I decided pretty early. I'm like, You know what? I know what I want to do. And then I didn't end up going to college. I was suppose I was supposed to go to to space and it just it just it didn't work out so well. I stayed in California and I was going to like city colleges and just kind of taking care of my kids and then also taking dance classes like as an 18 year old, I'm like, Yeah, guys can start dancing at 18, right? So I started taking dance classes and then I get a job working at Disneyland and at Disneyland. It was it was kind of great because like it was like my introduction to professional entertainment in theater, like I did the The Hunchback show. I was the first show that I did there, and there were the union performers and the parade performers, and I was just a great performer. But we were all in the show together. We all shared a green room and it was like, We're just one big cast, right? And so I got a chance to learn what the business was like with professionals who were doing it at that time and not just a bunch of like, I'm just going to dance at Disneyland. Even though that's what it was, I was like picking people's brains about like auditions and pictures and, you know, resume and you know, at that time, there's this magazine that would come out every week called backstage and backstage had all of the auditions posted on it. And then you can go see like what day, the week and what studio this audition is going to be. And then you got to go to that studio and then, you know, you wait in line and you audition for it and stuff.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:30:00] I feel like the kids listening at home. So that website backstage.com that used to be something that you subscribe to that would come to you in the mail. Right, right. And it was, you know, like. Playbill.com: Like, didn't have castings because Playbill.com: didn't exist. So backstage was like the Bible.

Marcus Choi [00:30:17] Backstage was our key to get to auditions. Yeah. You know, like it. They had they had ads for different agencies and agency auditions and meetings when you can, you know, hit them up. And then, you know, they have like an open call for dancers, you know, and so like, like 200 people would just show up at a studio and that's where the agents would find new clients. It was it was crazy like this was before the internet. This was before the digital world and it was a very, very analog. And we I just like me and a group of friends. We just learned the business from working at Disneyland, and I got a chance to to, uh, flower drum song out of town, the out of town try out was in L.A. at the mark taper, and so we did. That was in 2001. And then and then it went to New York. Fall of 2002.

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Gillian Pensavalle [00:31:21] Can you tell the listeners a little bit about that show and what it's about?

Marcus Choi [00:31:25] Sure. Yeah, I'd love to so Flower Drum Song is an old Rodgers and Hammerstein musical. It it was re adapted by David Henry Hwang, who is an amazing playwright. But he readapt did it for the stage in 2001 and and it's basically a story of East Meets West, right? It's a girl that comes from China and goes to San Francisco to meet her like a family friend, like her uncle. And he has a Peking Opera club. But his son, his son, is Americanized, grew up in America. He's in his 20s, and he's like young and vibrant, and he wants to have like a nightclub along with the Peking Opera. So there's like that father son dynamic where they're fighting generations and like cultural differences. And then and then you have an actual immigrant that comes in and kind of like unites the two, right? So like you have, you know, showgirls and you also have a bunch of guy dancers who are doing Peking Opera fight scenes with staffs and the whole outfit. It was incredible. But, you know, iconic songs like I enjoy being a girl

Marcus Choi [00:33:23] It's just it's just like, it's a beautiful story, because it's ultimately it's about a level of simulation on both sides of an understanding between father and son and a love like a beautiful love story between a man and a woman. And it just like it. It kind of brings generations together. And then there's a beautiful wedding at the very end, and it's just it'll always hold a very, very special place in my heart because that not only was at my Broadway debut, but like, we were truly a family, you know, and I'm still very, very close with everybody in that show and in so many people have gone on to do amazing things, you know, and oh god, just this couple of months ago. Kind of like the the patriarch of the flower drum song family. His name is Alvin Ing. He passed away from from COVID complications.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:34:27] Oh God, I'm sorry.

Marcus Choi [00:34:29] Thank you. He was also vaccinated. But you know, it's it's tough. It's tough because, you know, it's he was. He was he was older, almost. He was 89, 89 somewhere around there. Yeah. And it just like. It's hard that's a whole that's a whole nother thing where I'm just like, get vaccinated,

Gillian Pensavalle [00:34:54] you know, I lost a friend who was. Vaccinated, who was like thirty eight.

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Marcus Choi [00:35:02] Yeah, and it's not a perfect science, and I understand that,

Gillian Pensavalle [00:35:06] but it is science.

Marcus Choi [00:35:07] It is. It is science and it's and it is and it is helping, you know? Yeah, but but yeah, he he he passed away recently and he was, you know, beloved by so many people because he was truly Alvin Ing was truly a trailblazer. Like he's been doing musical theater since like the 50s.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:35:27] Right, right, right.

Marcus Choi [00:35:28] Like he was in the original company of flower jumps on the original tour. But like he did the first version of Flower Drum Song in the back of the day. He couldn't even audition for shows like King and I, even though he was Asian. Yeah, because they were all given to the roles are all given to white people. You know what I mean? So like for him to stick it out in the musical theater industry for that long and continue to work? He was just like a consummate artist, just always singing. He's like one of those guys who had like. If you say a word, he could sing like a verse of some show where that's that word was in it. You know, it just like uses like a musical theater guy through and through and. And we lost somebody who was, you know, just an incredible performance like he was in the original company of Pacific Overtures and in the revival company. You know, he you know, chrysanthemum tea. Yes, from. So that was him.

Marcus Choi [00:37:29] Yeah. Flower Drum Song. It's a it's beautiful story. But that was my Broadway debut. And then that's what brought me to New York. And I just realized, like, OK, I knew that our show wasn't going to last forever. I just need to start auditioning and my agents at the time, they're really great. They're like, Look, you're new. They just people need to get to know you. So I auditioned for everything, even if I wasn't right for it. You know, like I went out, I auditioned for Urban Cowboy, just like, I

Marcus Choi [00:38:01] don't belong here. But whatever you know, like,

Gillian Pensavalle [00:38:04] Just to get in front of the right people.

Marcus Choi [00:38:05] Yeah, yeah. And you know, there were certainly some, some horror stories mixed in there. But but yeah, I ended up getting wicked after that, and I found out that when Flower Drum Song

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was closing, like three days before we closed, I got the official offer for Wicked. And at the same time, I had booked. Um, what was it Ching Ho in Millie? The first national tour of Millie and I was just I didn't know what to do. Like, Wicked was an ensemble part and, you know, was a role, but it was a tour. Or should I do an original show? And everybody, like all the first people, I asked and everyone to tell you, always asks if you want to know something. Always ask the crew, guys or the dressers like you ask the technical people in the show who are like backstage. They know everything. You know what I mean?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:39:03] Totally.

Marcus Choi [00:39:04] Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And so everybody was like, Oh, that's not even a question. Do Wicked. Trust me, do Wicked. So I was like, OK. And so when I when I told the casting director that I wasn't going to do Millie, I won't name who it is. But you know, if you look up with the casting director, do. Millie was you'll figure it out. He was like, Well, have fun being in the ensemble for the rest of your life and hung up the phone. I was like, Oh God, what just happened?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:39:38] Also, what's wrong with that? Nothing.

Marcus Choi [00:39:41] I know the way. So like, yeah, even to this day, I'm like, Oh my God, it's like, it's such like a... Like a hilarious but awful story. You know what I mean?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:39:51] Yeah, yeah. Yeah, we're like, you just what? Yeah, that person sucks.

Marcus Choi [00:39:55] I ended up doing Wicked and and like Wicked was like Hamilton back in the day. It was like a rock concert concert where like people were lined up outside like crowds of people just to get into the show or get a lottery ticket or at the stage door. And just like the fandom, was insane.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:40:20] Yeah, Wicked was one of those shows where people would stage door without having seen the show that night just to get a glimpse of whoever was in the show that they were in love with at that point. It wasn't just Kristin Chenoweth or Idina Menzel or nobody else, but you know. But you know what? People would come in new people with Taye Diggs was there. You know, people were just outside Wicked, whether they saw the show or not.

Marcus Choi [00:40:42] Yeah. And at the Gershwin, there's there's a back entrance or exit. And even like people caught on to the back exit

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also like they would be waiting out there on both exits. Yeah. So yeah. And then after that, you know, I did a couple of other shows, but the thing ultimately, what made me kind of switch gears was I kept getting hurt. Like, I tore my Achilles oof and had to go into surgery. It was. It was a week before my last day hit Wicked. And then two weeks before I was going to start rehearsals for a sweet charity. Oh my god. So yeah, yeah, it turned. It was a bad situation. And but but, you know, it just kind of made me stop and just be still for a second because, you know, I'd been going go, go and gone for so long. And yeah, I fortunately was able to go back into into charity. But then when I was doing the times they are changing, I herniated discs in my back and and I was just like, Man, I totally understand like that. The the life of a dancer, of a Broadway dancer. And it is not easy. No, it's not easy. They, like dancers, are the backbone of the shows. You know what I mean? They are the people. It's like it's it's like it's such a thankless job, too, because. You know, you're not necessarily saying the words, you're not singing all the solos, but like you are the people who create the world. Right? And I just feel like, you know, so often dancers go unappreciated and unnoticed, and I just want to just put that out there like dancers are so important to to the industry.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:42:27] Yeah, they need to be taken care of more like, I have absolutely friends who have stories from, you know, without naming names or getting into specifics names of the dancers. But it shows like Wicked or like a Mary Poppins or something where people are getting hurt, like dancing on a chimney. That is not big enough to be tap dancing on and then falling off that chimney and then getting right back up literally in that moment and then covering for people the next day, not even having that day off to recover from falling six feet of a chimney that just wasn't big enough just to get a couple inches bigger, like just look after your dancers. I know they're superheroes, but they're really human, too. So just like, look after. Yeah.

Marcus Choi [00:43:07] And I think like part of the culture of dancing that we're also used to is like, like just dance through the pain, just get out of it.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:43:17] Oh my God. Athletes to deal with it.

Marcus Choi [00:43:19] Yeah, exactly. Because dancers are athletes, you know?

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Gillian Pensavalle [00:43:22] Absolutely, yes. Yeah. I just met like the NFL or whatever. Like, I just like, play through it, dance through it right now.

Marcus Choi [00:43:28] Right. And I think that that needs to change, you know, because that's why we have swings. That's why we have people there to help facilitate when somebody is injured and you have to you have to take care of yourself, you know? Yeah. Um, so ultimately, that was the reason why I move back to L.A. I was like, You know, I need to switch gears. I know I didn't want to stop performing, but I had to stop dancing like I had to stop focusing on dance as my my main vehicle to work.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:44:12] That Marcus always speaking the truth, and hey, there's more to come, because next week Marcus is talking Sharknado, Disneyland, chasing the dream despite others expectations and what comes next? Navigating the changing landscape of theater within Hamilton and the industry at large. It's a really great conversation. You don't want to miss it. So until then, stay safe. Stay healthy. I love you. Thanks so much for listening. I'm G. Pen

Gillian Pensavalle [00:45:12]

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