

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 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 this week I'm back with Marcus Choi, who plays George Washington in the Philip company. Last week, Marcus talked about getting back into action after nearly a year and a half away from the stage. Plus how he came to theater, his early connections to Alex Lacamoire and how the raucous Philip company came to be. So if you're all caught up here's part two of my conversation with Marcus right now he's in the middle of telling me how dance injuries made him want to take a step back from theater and take his career in a different direction. But you know what? I'll let him tell it.

Marcus Choi [00:00:59] So ultimately, that was the reason why I moved 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. You know, so I had always wanted to swing the bat, so to speak, when it came to TV and film in L.A. So like in like winter of 2008, I moved back to L.A. and and you know, one of the things that I love about New York is that it taught me how to hustle. Like, if you can hustle and work in New York, you can work anywhere, you can figure it out and work anywhere. And so I kind of took that same work ethic, that same mentality when I got to L.A. and I got on my feet, start auditioning, got my team together. And then probably around 2010, like summer of 2010, is when I really started getting out there and I started auditioning and booking jobs and, you know, worked worked pretty solid for like the next six or seven years.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:02:11] I mean, that's amazing.

Marcus Choi [00:02:12] Yeah, I was I was very fortunate. I was very fortunate to to kind of, you know, be exposed to the other side of entertainment, you know, and having that theater background. And you know, it's funny, too, because like in L.A., maybe it's different now,

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

but in L.A. at that time, if you had a Broadway, credit meant nothing. Was like, OK, cool.

Marcus Choi [00:02:34] Yeah, no, we'll see him. But whatever.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:02:38] Wow.

Marcus Choi [00:02:38] Yeah, yeah. Um, but anyway, so I I came to L.A. and I started working and I forgot what year it was, but I booked this job. What was it called? It was called.

Marcus Choi [00:02:53] Let's just say it was something like like Storm, you know? I was like, OK, cool.

Marcus Choi [00:03:01] Yeah, I had I had worked for this production company previously. It's called asylum films. And they do. They do a lot of like, you know, B-movies, you know, that are just like a lot of fun, really bad CGI. But like, you know, end of the world kind of movies, right? Just absurd narratives. And I had become pretty close with the with the casting director, and he was like, Hey, I got this audition for this film. Uh, it's just for like one scene. It's the opening scene, and I think you would be perfect for it. So do you want to come and audition? I was like, Sure. He's like, You sent me the size. He's like, Come in tomorrow. I was like, OK, great. So I showed up. The director was in the room, Anthony Ferrante, and we're all together and I do the scene. I was like, OK, great. Yeah. So I get the call. I booked it great. I show up on set and I look at the call sheet, which I when I thought it was going to be a movie called Storm or whatever it was, I forgot. I look at the call sheet and says, Sharknado, I was like, Oh my god, what is this title?

Marcus Choi [00:04:08] I figure I'm never going to put this on my resume

Gillian Pensavalle [00:04:28] But then it became like, yeah, go ahead, it's your.

Marcus Choi [00:04:32] It was crazy, like I was at, I was at a bar

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Marcus Choi [00:04:38] having a burger with my girlfriend one day, just random day. And all of a sudden the bartender's like talking to another bartenders like a change of channel to Sci-Fi right now. Sharknado is on. I was like Im sorry, what.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:04:53] what?

Marcus Choi [00:04:55] And then he goes, he goes, Yeah, yeah. Sharknado. And it's blowing up on Twitter was like, Are you kidding me? I'm in that. He's like, What? Oh my god, no way. So, so yeah, he turns it

Marcus Choi [00:05:10] to, you know, the movie. And, you know, I'm only in that first scene. But like, it was wild to see how crazy that film got. And then like the franchise after it went on for, like five films?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:22] Yeah. And it was like the new snakes on a plane. Mm hmm. Like the bad CGI? Yeah, catchphrases and all that. And then I guess like six or seven years later or whatever it was, they just gave us Sharknado again, and then they just ran with it, with Sharknado. Like, Yeah. Other and you weren't, but you were in another one.

Marcus Choi [00:05:39] So yeah, I was in the very last one. So what they do was what they did was they

Marcus Choi [00:05:44] took that first scene and then they ended the whole series with that scene again. So they revisit it.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:51] You'll forgive me if I haven't watched all of the sharknados.

Marcus Choi [00:05:53] No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. I would. I would judge you harshly if you did

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:58] the last Sharknado. It's about time

Gillian Pensavalle [00:06:02] Full name of the last Sharknado. Yeah.

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Marcus Choi [00:06:07] So, yeah, I mean, I haven't even seen it, but they call me what I think when we had just started the tour, we're in Seattle and the director calls me and he's like, Hey, you know, we'd like to shoot. Um, we'd like to shoot you for our closing scene, and I'm like, Oh man, I I'm on tour right now. I'm in Seattle. He's like, Oh, you're not in L.A. I'm like, No, I haven't been for like four years. Like, Oh, OK, well, don't worry about it. I think we can. We can probably shoot around it and just use like old footage from, you know, leftover stuff that they did back in when we shot the first time. So my I had a different haircut. I had facial hair now and I'm like, Yeah, I don't I don't know of the continuity would would be great. So they ended up just using footage from the beginning, and then I ended up like recording some like extra lines.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:07:04] Sure.

Marcus Choi [00:07:05] Yeah. You know, just as like, you know, off camera B-roll stuff. And so I guess they, you know, implemented that into the scene and you know, we're done. I even recorded it on my iPhone.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:07:16] You know what? There's something about it that's like, just make the thing. That's the whole like thesis of this podcast. Just make it like just

Marcus Choi [00:07:25] Just make it

Gillian Pensavalle [00:07:25] thing and that they're just like, you know, we'll use footage from however many years ago. And can you just do a quick pick up on your phone like while you're on tour with Hamilton? Sure, you just make it. Just put it out there. Just do it like that. Was it to everyone listening at home. Like if you wait to be fully prepared to do something, you're never going to do it. You're never going to do it. They can make eight Sharknado movies or whatever. Like, you can make the thing, right?

Marcus Choi [00:07:47] Also, like Gillian, like, that's another reason why I'm like, I'm so proud of you. Like, I love that you're doing this thing, that you've been doing it for this long

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Gillian Pensavalle [00:07:54] Oh thanks Marcus, thats so nice.

Marcus Choi [00:07:56] It's one of those things were like, you know, you just like so many people like, I want to do a podcast, you know, but like, nobody ever really does it or like, Oh, we should do a podcast on this. And you did it and you continue to do it. And I think that you've become like this like, you know, staple in the industry, which is really great. And like, even during the pandemic, I feel like there's so many podcasts that started doing the pandemic. And even I've like debated on doing one show. But I'm just like, Oh, it's logistically it's just too much. And then I just give up and then, you know, I sit and watch them like British Baking Show and drink some whiskey instead.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:08:35] Hey, all of those things.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:08:37] Are A-OK, well, thank you so much. It is hard. You know, my my job job now is True Crime Obsessed, my other podcast that I started because of this one, because Patrick Hinds reached out to me when I was doing the Hamilcast because he was doing Broadway back story, theater people who were Broadway podcasters and we became friends. And now we have this business and it's amazing. But it's really hard. Yeah, Patrick always said, like, everyone can do a podcast for two weeks and then you realize, Oh my god, there's deadlines, and how do I do this? And what do I do? And like booking people? And Patrick and I would recap true crime documentaries. So like the prep is all on me to do. But like, I love the booking aspect of it for the Hamilcast because like everyone wants everyone else to be on it, which is a really nice thing. It's an honor that people want their friends to also be on the show. So, yeah, look, it's going to go on forever. And I. I will Sharknado five.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:09:29] I just keep it going.

Marcus Choi [00:09:31] I mean, I can totally put you in touch with the two of you. I know that she would love to do it.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:09:35] Please do. It's so funny because when we were, when I did that big recording in Vegas with the Philip company, I was on stage in Vegas and I see a dear dear friend of mine from New

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

York City on the stage, and it was one of those out of context, mind, fuck things where I'm like, Emily,

Gillian Pensavalle [00:09:53] what is Emily doing? And we had we did those that thing, the high pitched, jumping, screaming, whatever. But I wasn't expecting to see I was like, Is this a fever dream? Is the God to me? What does Emily Tarver the love of my life doing on the stage in Vegas? And how, like what? Because she's really good friends with... So that became that kind of situation. And so we talked a lot about that. But anyway, yes, I mean, yeah, and everyone's busy, you know, and I wanted to like, I don't know, I always I try not to be too pushy about it, but everyone's welcome all the time. Yeah.

Marcus Choi [00:10:27] OK, cool. I will.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:10:28] OK. Here's a question, though. Where are your parents and all this? They thought you were going to be a marine biologist.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:10:33] Oh, right, right, right. Right, right. So going going back to that, so.

Marcus Choi [00:10:37] So it's funny story when I when I told them that I wanted to be an actor. They just like all parents, are just like, Oh, it's just the phase. You know, you grow out of it. And and their whole thing was like, they always just wanted me to go back to school to get a degree. You know, I feel like as parents are like, Oh, our job is done. You know what I mean?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:11:01] Yeah.

Marcus Choi [00:11:01] But that just wasn't in the cards for me. So when I when I wasn't able to go to space, I wanted to get a job that was going to get me out of California, like immediately. So I started working at Disneyland. I got a job working on a cruise ship like six months after, and I hopped onto a cruise ship and disappeared for six months. It was amazing, had a blast, and then I came back and then went back to performing at Disneyland. Was taking like two or three classes a week at the at the City College just to appease my parents, you know? And then I ended up getting a job working in Korea, and then

THE H★MILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

I came back and then I ended up getting a job in doing flower drum song. Um yeah. And then Disneyland was also kind of like the job that I always go back to whenever I'm at home, you know? And like, I've been there, I've been there so many times for so long that like now, it's just like, it's like family, you know, in in the same way that like a lot of my colleagues, when I was in New York, the first time are, you know, producing, directing and, you know, just

Marcus Choi [00:12:10] doing other creative things now. All the people that I was working with back in the day at Disneyland are now in casting and directing and choreographing and. And so, you know, I just I reach out. I'm like, Hey, I'm in town. Is there anything that I can audition for, you know, just because some hours and you know, and they're really great about facilitating, you know, shifts for professional actors who are just going to be available at a moment's notice. You know? Yeah. Wow. So I love that they have always kind of been a family. Um, like this is the perfect example, like the level of talent that comes through Disneyland. I know a lot of people just crap on Disney because it's like, Oh, Disney Entertainment, whatever. Like, Oh, you just you only worked at Disneyland. Well, there's a lot of people who have not only been on Broadway but are constantly on TV and voice, different actors on cartoons, and that all work at Disneyland, like Eden Espinosa, was in the very first like I met her when I was 18 doing the hunchback show.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:13:10] Wow.

Marcus Choi [00:13:11] Yeah, we we grew up together. You know what I mean?

Marcus Choi [00:13:14] Yeah, like Stephanie Block used to work at Disneyland, right? You know what I mean? So. Yeah. So, yeah, like Disney was always kind of like that. The place that I would always go back to that I didn't have to get a normal job. And at the same time, I was still performing and still learning. And so I just knew I'm like, I'm not going to go back to school, certainly not go back to school

Marcus Choi [00:13:35] to get in like it, like a BFA. Like, I knew that I was learning everything that I needed to like. I still take

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

class. I still train, I'm still practicing. I'm still doing things to further my art. Right? And so I think all that was a discipline that I learned just from the act of doing right. When you're thrust into a moment and then you have to learn on the job, that's better than any class you're ever going to take.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:14:03] I couldn't agree more. That's learning by doing exactly that's. That's the way to do it, for sure. For me, anyway, so

Marcus Choi [00:14:09] when I was in Wicked, I flew my parents out to New York. I put them up at a hotel, pay for the weekend, got them tickets to see the show introduce them to everybody. And after everything was done, I was like, Well, we're all at dinner and I'm like, So you know what? You guys think, did you? Did you enjoy the show? like, oh, yeah, yeah, it also was good, it was good.

Marcus Choi [00:14:32] OK, well, that wasn't convincing. Do you understand that like as far as musical theater goes, that this is like a big deal? You know, this is kind of like, this is the biggest thing right now. Like, yeah, but when are you going to go back to school? So..

Marcus Choi [00:14:49] I had to have like a, you know, come to coming to Jesus moment with them. I had to sit them down and I was like, Look in my dressing room. I sit next to guys who are tens, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt because they're doing the same thing. They went to school to do the same thing that I'm doing right now. If I go back to school, it's not going to be to learn more about acting or performing. It's going to be to learn something new. And right now, I don't want to learn anything new. I want to continue to learn and do what I'm doing.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:15:24] Wow.

Marcus Choi [00:15:24] And so until I want to learn something new. You guys got to let this go.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:15:28] Wow, Marcus, that's like,

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Marcus Choi [00:15:31] yeah, they they're like, Well, I. OK. Yeah, I mean,

Marcus Choi [00:15:35] I mean, this is all you've ever done. I'm like, Yeah, yeah. So, you know, after that talk, you know, they bought on, they got on board and now it's like, you know, whenever they see an Asian on TV, they're just like, So how come this is this isn't you? Oh, how come, how come you didn't get this? I'm just like, Oh my God, there's no winning.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:15:56] There's no there's a lot of work to do.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:15:58] this industry is. Oh, yeah, yeah.

Marcus Choi [00:16:03] So yeah, they, you know, I'm still very, very close to my parents. And and now they're fully supportive of what I do, and they're super excited that I'm in Hamilton. And, you know, I think they've seen me a few times and they understand the relevance of the show and they understand how unique it is and and how popular it is. And so they're, you know, they're really happy for me. And you know, they just they just want me to. Ultimately, they just want me to be happy. Of course. Um yeah, as all parents do, right? And so I think that, you know, they they once they understood that like this is, I'm like, I'm doing what I want to do and what makes me happy and like. And I and I was lucky enough to figure that out pretty early on because my brother and sister hopped around a different kind of career paths a little bit. Uh, which is fine because I want to say like ninety nine percent of the country does that, you know, of course, I was fortunate to to kind of figure it out pretty early on. And yeah, and this is this is this is all I've ever done. And so they they they got on board and now they're OK with it.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:17:15] Oh my God, that's amazing.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:17:17] This comes up a lot on the podcast about parents or having to have these kinds of conversations. And I always say that like, I get it. I mean, I have family members who, you know, I don't speak to for however many reasons, but that they just don't get it. Like if you don't get that, if you didn't grow up in a world where wicked where you know the wicked is the biggest thing on Earth

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

at the time. And you really want your son to be happy and to succeed and not worry and be have a stressful life like what you do is can be really stressful, Marcus. It's really uncertain. And so I never begrudge parents who, at least for a little bit, are like, Well, you're going to what? Because because you know, what's a sure thing? Being an accountant, you know, like.

Marcus Choi [00:18:03] Right

Gillian Pensavalle [00:18:04] But I love that when you had this really honest and probably incredibly difficult conversation to have, they heard you? They listen.

Marcus Choi [00:18:11] Yeah. You know, there's like I recently did like this kind of like a these like educational videos for these like theater students overseas. And one of the segments was on like advice and. I talked about the ratio like you just brought up. I talked about the ratio between working or auditioning and working, you know, and for like it's I think, you know, I think it's something like for every 100 auditions you get in, you book maybe like one to 10 jobs. You know, it's not easy. Yeah. And you know, so many people that I worked with, just like, I hate auditioning. A lot of people hate auditioning. Auditioning is awful. You know, in any other,

Marcus Choi [00:19:03] in any other like profession in the world, you literally have an interview. You look at the person's qualifications and you hire them based on what they've done. Right? You're not constantly having to prove yourself it like in a performance, right? And so, you know, like I just decided a long time ago, I'm like, I'm going to love auditioning because I have to do it anyway. And if I if I continue to hate it, it's not going to help. It's not going to service me in any way. So my whole mentality and my advice that I gave to them was just like, Learn to love it. If you're going to do this job. Learn to love it. And also think of it as when you get paid doing a job performing, that's not you getting paid to perform. You're paying yourself for all the auditions. You're working for fun.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:19:59] Oh yeah

THE H★MILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Marcus Choi [00:20:00] That's what it feels like. Because when you actually work, when you're doing the thing, you're having so much fun, right? And it's like, you do this because you love it. And if you're not having fun, don't do it. You know, there's there's a moment, there's a moment. I feel like every performer goes through when they get on stage or they're in front of a camera or they're just doing something and they've done it so many times. The joy, the love is gone. And, you know, from a day to day basis, it can always, you know, you can be up, you can be down. That's just the nature of the job. But like you get to, there's some people who get to a point where you just like, I do not love this job anymore. I am not happy here.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:20:41] Yep.

Marcus Choi [00:20:41] And yet they still continue to do the job. My advice is, when you're at that point, you should just go.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:20:47] Yeah

Marcus Choi [00:20:48] because you'll be happier and everybody else around you will probably be happier too. You know what I mean?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:20:54] I do. I know exactly what you mean. I do.

Marcus Choi [00:20:56] Yeah, and I and I understand, you know, everybody has different circumstances like financial, you know, circumstances and like working on Broadway. As expensive as it is to live in New York City, working on Broadway is a living wage, you know? And if you're a principal on Broadway, it's a very good living wage. And so I understand feeling that that like I need to to work. Even if you're not happy because you know you create a life, you have different circumstances, circumstances. Some people have kids, they have a mortgage and I get it. But at some point, I feel like your happiness is more important, especially after everything that we went through the last year and a half. I feel like the importance of happiness and joy needs to take precedence over different circumstances, you know?

THE H★MILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Gillian Pensavalle [00:21:51] Yeah, I mean, what are your thoughts on everything that's going on with Broadway and theater in general? And these changes that we want to see changes that some companies are making, like Hamilton bringing in a healer? I mean, I never this was 2019. I would have been like Broadway companies are having. I believe in healers, you know what I mean? Like, it's not. I would I would be shocked to hear that this is even being entertained. I would be shocked to hear that the choreography that is that is set in stone on Disney Plus is now changing. And what did I miss? Because cast members said this needs to change. And now instead of saying, well, it's on Disney, it's like it's there forever now. No, no, no, we're going to have that conversation. So I'm just curious what you think about what's going on in the world in terms of like racism and representation and how Broadway's handling it and dealing with it. And just I want to hear from you about that.

Marcus Choi [00:22:50] Well, there's a reason why it's called the Great White Way.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:22:53] Oh, yeah.

Marcus Choi [00:22:54] And I'm not saying that Broadway is racist, but Broadway is racist because of its like the roots of which Broadway shows are based in. Like it's been around for so long when only white actors would grace those stages. Right? And so the culture, even though the landscape of the of the actors change and the colors change, the culture is based in tradition. Right? And so I think that's why it's also. Difficult as far as like the behind the scenes relationship goes, because everybody knows that like the performing world is is so dramatically different than corporate America, like the people don't walk around in their underwear in an office.

Marcus Choi [00:23:48] You know what I mean?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:23:50] I do. Yeah.

Marcus Choi [00:23:50] That's just that's just the way the, you

Marcus Choi [00:23:53] know, being an actor on stage is it's like everyone's running around going from change to change and you're just

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

like, we're all just together and. And so, like the culture of theater. Is is locked into this like this like this deep rooted history of what what Broadway was and. And I think that it's it's coming to a breaking point, a boiling point, and it's clashing with people who are just fed up, fed up of mistreatment, fed up with misrepresentation. And and I feel like everybody has a valid point. And to tip the scales too far from one side or the other like I would never like, I understand solidarity. And I understand when when we need to stand together and be unified. But I would never ask anybody to quit a job based on the color of their skin. Because everybody I don't care what color you are, everybody has worked really hard

Marcus Choi [00:25:07] to get onto one of those stages in the halls of Midtown and and who who am I to ask you or demand you to give up that accomplishment? Now that doesn't go to say that, like the conversation needs to happen as far as kind of opening up the lens of understanding and tolerance and acceptance. And I think, yes, there are some people who are trying to make the culture shift from a certain level, but the level needs to start from the top. Like the people at the top, the producers, the casting directors, the directors, the writers, the people at the top need to make that shift. And once that happens, then everything will kind of fall into place. But we're working upstream right now and we do have people who are making a difference. And I truly believe that, like, like full transparency, I truly feel that the Hamilton Company is doing their best to right any kind of wrong that might have happened in the past or change the culture of of musical theater on their end. And and I think because Hamilton has such a presence in the industry right now that their economics is kind of like they shift the whole business, right? And so I think, you know, the thing that I'm most proud of is that they listen, you know, and I think it's really hard to do when you don't have to, you know? And I think that they're doing a good job of trying to make the right changes for the company members and also just for the culture of Hamilton, the culture of the show. And and I think the great thing about all of all the companies returning is that they got another chance to do it. They got another chance to kind of wipe the slate clean and and kind of do it right. It's it's hard because it's such a nuanced conversation and it's going to and it's going to be different for everybody, you know? And and there are people who who did speak out about their trauma related to the show.

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Gillian Pensavalle [00:27:42] Yeah.

Marcus Choi [00:27:44] But I think the feeling that I get, I don't know that I don't know the people who who, you know, blasted their grievances through media and social media and the newspapers and stuff. I don't know them personally. And I certainly can't talk about the trauma that they experienced because I was never there to experience it or I never witnessed it firsthand. I think that there's a lot of hurt that happened. But the feeling that I get and I just like I feel like this has been happening for a long time is, is that like there's just a misunderstanding that happens when expectations don't meet somebody's or like the delivery of a certain thing, right? Whether you get paid or you're able to do a certain thing, the delivery of that doesn't meet your expectations. So you take it personally. And that's where the trauma happens. And I think the misunderstanding is that they blame the job when the job isn't trying to hurt them. It's it's literally just like, this is just what the job is. And I'm sorry, you're not going to get what you're what you're asking for. You know, again, I'm not privy to all the information. I'm literally just on the outside looking in. Right?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:29:13] Yeah, same.

Marcus Choi [00:29:17] But it's hard because I try to understand and there's just a lot of things I don't get. But the thing that I do see that's consistent is that there's a lot of pain and trauma that was experienced, and I just don't know if it's necessarily directed at the right places. It's it's hard. It's hard because everybody is going to interpret whatever experience that they want in whatever way that they do. And for some people they take, they took it much harder or they they took things much harder. And and I think that. The Hamilton Company has done like a pretty good job of trying to accommodate or facilitate, you know, the relationship with these people, but it's yeah, it's just it's just got messy, man. I was I was shocked.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:30:17] Yeah, yeah. And as with anything, there's always a lot of stuff going on behind the scenes that nobody really knows about at all.

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Marcus Choi [00:30:25] Sure.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:30:26] Yeah, that's always at play, too good and bad. There's stuff that we don't know and might not ever know.

Marcus Choi [00:30:31] Yeah, yeah, I .. I'm a huge believer in staying in your lane. And so like even when the even when like things are happening, like

Marcus Choi [00:30:48] within our show or our company and it's none of my business and my first initial reaction is, you know, because I'm in, you know, one of the older cast mates and and I've been here for some time now, my initial reaction is to intervene and do something about it or help, like, I don't know, facilitate or smooth things over or just, you know, anything that I can, you know? But I just also have to remember, it's not my business, it's not my lane. And and whatever somebody is, might be going through. They just need to go through it, you know?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:31:27] Well, I I thank you for being so honest and open with me about this. I know sometimes people I don't know don't want to have those conversations. So thanks for.

Marcus Choi [00:31:39] Of course. I mean, it's hard because like, I don't want a saving that's going to offend anybody because I understand how difficult the situation is. But like, you know, I, I can only kind of speak on my own experiences and my own opinion. And and I just I understand that it's just really hard situation right now. You know, and and and I think the only way to get through this is just to have the conversations, right? I don't necessarily agree with how they went about doing it, but that's them, you know? So, yeah, yeah.

Marcus Choi [00:32:22] Oh, no, no, I was. I was just listening to your last podcast with James.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:32:26] James Iglehart.

Marcus Choi [00:32:27] Yeah, I think he had like it was recentish.

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Gillian Pensavalle [00:32:31] Yeah, he was on years ago. And so he came back during, yeah, you know, lockdown virtually.

Marcus Choi [00:32:36] I was just listening to it and I'm like, Oh my God,

Marcus Choi [00:32:39] that guy. He's always busy, always busy working on everything. And I was just like, I'm you know, it's all my, Oh my god, I'm going to. I'm not going to have anything to talk about.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:32:51] Are you kidding me? Well, first of all, I'm loving this conversation, but I was just going to ask you, Marcus, are you ready to take some questions from the Patreon Peeps?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:33:00] Let's do it. They love you

Gillian Pensavalle [00:33:31] Tracy, who's Eli's mom?

Marcus Choi [00:33:34] Oh, yes, hi.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:33:35] She's a Patreon Peep, by the way. Like an official Patreon Peep, she says. I just want to thank you for being the amazing person slash hero slash role model or thank you for talking with the kiddos at Reach Leadership Steam Academy. Oh yeah, most of all, thank you for guiding my boy. So why does she talk about this leadership?

Marcus Choi [00:33:54] So over pandemic there? There was, I think it was like a class of like, I don't know, like fifth or sixth graders or something like that. And we they were studying U.S. history. And so we had this big zoom call. It was me, Elijah and Fergie. And we just kind of, you know, we just spent an hour with the kids talking with them and answering questions and just being silly, you know, like we we since we literally talk every day, it's like the conversations just continue, you know, and and like the kids were just kind of privy to it.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:34:30] That's awesome that like they loved that they be sort of like it, feel, Oh my God, they're having a conversation. It feels like we're part of it. That's so cool.

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Marcus Choi [00:34:38] Yeah, now it was. It was really great to spend the afternoon with them. And, you know, they're asking us some really great questions and we had this little girl give us, give us a performance. Afterwards, she's saying one of the Schuyler Sisters songs. I think it was Satisfied. Oh, but it was. It was awesome. It was like a great great afternoon to spend with the kids.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:34:58] Aw that's great. Yeah. Mae says. I just saw him Wednesday night, and when I tell you, I sobbed during one last time. And then she says, Lot L with a bunch of A's, a bunch of W's and a bunch D's, this man can sang, she says. So Mae.

Marcus Choi [00:35:14] Oh, thanks, Mae.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:35:16] Thank you.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:35:18] Lynn, not Manuel Miranda. There's another Lin, she says. For generations, Washington was an inspirational figure. But the view many people had of him as a paragon has changed over the years. I feel your Washington gives us a well-rounded vision. What inspired you or challenged you about the man as you began to create your portrayal?

Marcus Choi [00:35:38] Wow, great question. Um yeah. So when I was doing research on Washington, I just I realized that like, yes, he is the father of the country and like this like God like figure where he could do no wrong, you know? But in actuality, there was a lot of things that he failed at, you know? And so I think one thing that I really wanted to focus on was. Like what he struggled with and just kind of not only kind of uphold his integrity, but portray his. Like imperfections, you know, like just be honest, when he's struggling and not pretend that everything is OK, you know, to have this like, you know, I think that it's easy to have this veneer of like stoic ism when you're playing Washington. You know, we're like, you're supposed to be this person who who was like rock solid all the time that just like nothing affected him. But, you know, he a lot of things did. He struggled a lot like, I believe the reason why he was so successful in the Revolutionary War was because he failed so much in the French and Indian War. You know, he lost so many battles, you know,

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Marcus Choi [00:37:09] and and like one of the things that I also, uh, I listen to an audiobook doing pandemic cold Washington in the the first conspiracy. And it was basically about all of leading up to the war. It was basically about all of the spies that were loyalists that were living in in New York at the time that were infiltrating Washington's camp, basically. Oh, wow. So yeah, that was really fascinating because, you know, that's just something that I never really came across. And um, and like, that's certainly like that really kind of affected my relationship with that first scene that that office scene during right hand man. It really affected my my relationship with Burr. Like, I don't really know who he is.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:38:02] Oh, yeah!

Marcus Choi [00:38:03] like my my whole thing is like, who is this guy that's just showing up? Is he one of the spies?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:38:08] Oh, that is so cool.

Marcus Choi [00:38:10] You know what I mean?

Marcus Choi [00:38:11] And it's just like, it's such like a like a small layer of like, oh, like an aha moment, right? Because that's something that I really want to kind of like play with, like, who am I suspicious of? Because at the time, everyone, everyone was like, OK, so just a little bit of history.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:38:28] Yes.

Marcus Choi [00:38:29] The governor of New York was Governor Tryon, right, just like Fort Tryon Park? Mm hmm. And he was a British loyalist. And so he was the number one villain to Washington's position, right? He was the one who was trying to get rid of Washington. He was the one who was trying to pay people off to spy on Washington and then basically, like, undercut him or just like foil his plans. Right? Washington ended up getting catching word of this and and went to Congress and asked if he if they could arrest him and send him back to Britain. So. Tryon find out about this and went on to a British battleship that was just basically docked in the East Bay.

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Right. Like, right, right off of Manhattan. And and because that's technically international water, nobody could arrest him. So he had the backing of all the British money. Right. And so he was still able to pay people off to spy on Washington and bring him back in the middle of the night. People would row their boats out to his boat and he would feed them, you know, wine and cheese and meats. You know what? Charcuterie board?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:39:58] Yeah.

Marcus Choi [00:39:59] Of sorts and and pay them off. And and you know, people would would flip sides because he was paying them so much money and

Gillian Pensavalle [00:40:08] getting them hammered.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:40:10] Yeah. But also like literally right there, like you could see his ship and they couldn't do anything. Oh my God.

Marcus Choi [00:40:17] So, you know, all of the spy references like when Mulligan was talking, you know, talking about spying on the on the British troops and like all of that, comes right into play. It's all within the text of the show, you know? And so I really wanted to I really wanted to like, infuse that information into anywhere that I could into the show. So like that was like a really cool like aha moment. While, you know, while I was listening to this to this book, it was really cool.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:40:48] I mean, if there are also whole shows about like Washington's spies that he had, of course, there were other spies on the other side, too. Exactly. There are places all over Long Island where you can like walk the trails that the spies walk. And I also love that you're still reading and learning about this person.

Marcus Choi [00:41:06] Yeah, I think it's important to, you know what I mean. Yet because it's so easy, like when we've done the show over 900 times, you know what I mean? Like it's maybe not that 800 times, I think 800 was the last one, but still like it's crazy. The number is staggering, right? And so like, it could very easily become stale. You

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

could just very easily just like phone it in and just say the words like, it's such a genius piece of theater. If you just say the words, you're going to come off looking, all right. You know what I mean?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:41:38] Totally.

Marcus Choi [00:41:39] And I think that's that's one of the traps of the show. You know, it's so easy to like, just play off of the hype and just say the words. And so I think that was one of the things that I was, you know, always kind of reading books and kind of researching different things. And, you know, if something if there's like a morsel of information that you can implement into the show, even if it's not like in-your-face for me, just keeping it in mind, like that's always going to kind of help me, you know?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:42:11] Yeah, I love I love all these like deep dives, and that's so much. Lynn is also asking, she said. Secondly, what is your own personal vine and fig tree that is a place on this earth where you feel the most at peace?

Marcus Choi [00:42:25] Oh man. Like in a forest somewhere like, mm hmm. I would say I went to so many national parks last year.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:42:38] Oh, that's awesome.

Marcus Choi [00:42:39] Like my girlfriend and I, we just like we just did this epic road trips. Um, Glacier National Park. Incredible. The Tetons. The Tetons were amazing. I grew up in California, so like Sequoia National Park is great. But like Yosemite, it's it's it's like it's breathtaking. You know? Yeah. And so for me, I think just kind of being in nature and just, you know, being still and enjoying kind of an untouched environment and it's just natural form. I think that's my vine and fig tree where I just like I know that I can find peace, you know? Yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:43:26] Carrie is asking, what is your favorite GW line? And if you could portray any other character who whom she says to question marks? Would it be

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Marcus Choi [00:43:40] Favorite Washington line? I don't. I don't know. You know, I somebody asked me that before, and I there's so many great moments. I think, you know, when he says, I want to sit under my own vine and fig tree, like, that's a great moment.

Marcus Choi [00:44:28] And certainly, certainly when he hands off the quill for the last time, you know, just that understanding between him and Hamilton, I think that's that's a beautiful moment.

Marcus Choi [00:45:51] Yeah. I don't know.

Marcus Choi [00:45:53] I mean, there are some lines that I will never forget because I've messed up like I have this, I have this whole thing where like, you know, I'm sure you're aware of the Burr corners. Sure. Yeah. And I my whole thing is like this we call it the Hamilton train. Right? The show is just constant. It's a constant beat that's constantly going and going and going and. And if you are silent, that is more noticeable than saying of wrong line.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:46:24] Yes.

Marcus Choi [00:46:26] So my thing is like any noise is better than no noise.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:46:32] No, I swear. I get it. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Marcus Choi [00:46:35] So so I've I've, you know, I've I've spoken gibberish on that stage many times. Mm-Hmm. There was one time after the the second cabinet battle or I say, when I turned to Hamilton, I say Hamilton draft a statement of neutrality. Like, right after, you know, I say that you were that your ideals blind you to reality. Hamilton draft a statement of neutrality. For some reason, I said Hamilton, I said blast. And that threw me off in the moment. So I was like Hamilton blast a ----- . And he hands me the mic and I walk off stage. And at the time, Kyle was playing Jefferson Jamal was standing on set. And it's just then to looking at each other like, Oh,

Gillian Pensavalle [00:47:23] yes, yes, I will do that

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Marcus Choi [00:47:24] Just trying. Just trying to keep it together. Yeah, there's one type. So like draft a statement of neutrality, I'll never forget.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:47:30] Yeah, right, right.

Marcus Choi [00:47:31] There's one time I there's one time I didn't come back on stage.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:47:35] Oh, no.

Marcus Choi [00:47:37] You know, because I have to write doing that scene. I come back and say, I say Hamilton. And then he goes, Daddy called daddy's calling.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:47:42] Oh no

Marcus Choi [00:47:44] Because I had to pee. Oh my God, I was so distraught.

Marcus Choi [00:47:48] I was so distracted from having to pee. As soon as I exited, I just like took off and I'm in the bathroom like, Oh no, oh no. Oh no.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:47:59] So you didn't make it. They just said it anyway. Daddy's calling.

Marcus Choi [00:48:02] No, they didn't even see daddy's calling. He says, Yeah, you're nothing without that. The behind you. And it was silence and they just looked at each other. And then I think Kyle, I think Kyle waved bye. And then Joseph just walked off.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:48:15] Yeah, right. Oh my God.

Marcus Choi [00:48:20] So as far as favorite lines go, that's it. It's a very bad answer. So I apologize. It was the second part of that question.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:48:26] The second question was if you could portray any other character, who would it be?

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Marcus Choi [00:48:29] Oh, yes. I mean, we kind of talked about this before. I would love to do Lafayette. Jefferson could just because I think it would be so much fun, but I don't want to jump off of that table. No, and I just I like I just feel like all of the Sons of Liberty material is just exhausting. It's exhausting. Like, there's so there's so much energy between the three of them, you know, and I know that they they really carry each other. Yeah. You know, especially the first half of of Act one. I would just I would be, I would be a wreck every night. I would be so tired.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:49:09] Yeah.

Marcus Choi [00:49:11] But more recently, I think I've thought about maybe doing like I was like, What am I? What would it be like if I play Burr? I think I think that would be kind of fun. But there's just so many words

Gillian Pensavalle [00:49:23] at another table jump. Ask Nik Walker

Marcus Choi [00:49:25] And another table jump. Yeah. And then, like, the show, doesn't get easier for him until the very, very end.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:49:33] Yeah.

Marcus Choi [00:49:35] I mean, I do not envy the Burrs. It's exhausting. It's exhausting. I mean, so is a Hamilton. But I think Burr has to sing more than Hamilton.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:49:45] Yeah, I would think. I mean, Burr is would always be my dream role in the show. Yeah. Burr Burr. Or like a woman four who could just like perfectly dance the Yorktown dance break.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:49:56] That's the dream I have.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:49:58] Because as you walked out. But Hamilton has more words faster. He raps more. I could see how they're equally exhausting.

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Marcus Choi [00:50:08] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Or like, I guess maybe one of the Schuyler sisters, because I love that number. Oh yeah. I'm not in it.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:50:15] Yeah, we haven't even met you yet.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:50:16] Yeah, just hanging out.

Marcus Choi [00:50:21] Yeah, I think so. Warren Egypt. Yes. Recently realized that after my shot, I don't come back on until guns and ships. No, no. I mean, right hand man. And he was like, So you're just sitting throughout that. You're not doing anything to the whole beginning of the show because

Marcus Choi [00:50:45] by the time I actually come on, they've done like six numbers and they're all exhausted.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:50:50] Yeah, because we we meet you, you know, like we meet every one of the first number. But the moment you've been waiting for like that, yeah,

Marcus Choi [00:50:56] that isn't after farmer isn't till after former farmers refuted. And then and then we meet King George.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:51:03] Yeah, it's a while

Marcus Choi [00:51:07] Again. Thank you. Christopher Jackson for crafting an amazing track.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:51:13] Yeah, but I could see you know of Jefferson like Warren saying, Wait, you're right. So what do you do?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:51:21] What are you doing?

Marcus Choi [00:51:23] Yeah, I I read a lot.

Marcus Choi [00:51:25] Yeah, I read a lot.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:51:27] Yeah.

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 296 MARCUS CHOI PART 2 TRANSCRIPT

Gillian Pensavalle [00:51:37] And that, among many other reasons, is why we believe in Chris Jackson. All right. Next week, I'll be back with Marcus Choi to wrap up our conversation. He's taking more questions from the Patreon Peep. Talking about the process of getting back into Hamilton in the time of COVID and the importance of seeing yourself on stage. Plus favorite tour stops and the best places to eat while on the road. So that's it for me. I love you. Thank you so much for listening. Stay safe out there. I'll talk to you soon. I'm G. Pen.

[00:52:39]

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