

# THE HAMILCAST

## EPISODE 305 CHRISTOPHER HENRY YOUNG 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 picking up where I left off with Christopher Henry Young of the And Peggy company. Check out last week's episode to learn about how Christopher found the healing power of theater in high school, how he advanced his craft through self-discipline and placing himself in rooms of opportunity, and how trusting in his hard work paid off. But hey, if you're all set. Here we go. Please enjoy part two of my conversation with Christopher Henry Young.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:00:45] Tell the listeners about Broadway Plus, though, because I think it's I think everything you're saying is great, the accessibility and I think people listening to you are going to want to jump into one of your classes or workshops or anything. So just let the listeners know about the amazing that's that is Broadway Plus I was on the website yesterday, actually.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:01:00] Yes. Broadway Plus is this incredible platform that brings professional theater artists to the fans, to the next generation of artists, to people who want to shout out and they do everything you can do virtual concerts, you can do live classes, you can do one on ones. Q&A is there are so many different things that I've done, and they're all through the Broadway Plus platform. You can go on and find people from shows all over the place they have them categorized, both by the artists names. You can go search for your artists individual Christopher Henry Young, or you can go look at certain shows Mean Girls, Hamilton and you can search through the catalog. And if you're like, I'm a future Eliza, I want to play Eliza. You can go into Broadway Plus and you can find one of the Elizas, see what workshops, classes or opportunities they offer. And then for the prices of those differing things, you can get that experience. You can do one on one virtual concerts. Q&As masterclasses, whatever it is. And again, as a person who. Has always believed in bridging the gap it's about, it's about the pipeline. I believed I could have stopped because I believed that the distance between where I was in that production of

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Beauty and the Beast and where I am now in Hamilton, I used to believe that was essentially the distance between two separate galaxies. It was impossible for me and my circumstances at the time. But the reality is the distance is actually more akin to getting from the entrance of a theme park to your favorite roller coaster. It's all about navigating it. It's actually not that far to go. It might be a little treacherous. You might run into some kids crying over cotton candy, but it's not that there's not that far. It's more of just a navigation thing. And so Broadway Plus is that connective one of those connective tools that I am such a fan of, they're so lovely to work with. And the people that I get to meet, I mean, I've done, you know, live and virtual workshops that they now offer because we can and they adhere to as many safety standards as the CDC and rules, so we're always masked. They always like make sure that live workshops at so you can feel safe. We do social distancing if someone sing in and take their mask off and all these things that that then allow me to do what I'm so passionate about and in the safest way possible. And like I said, they're all so nice. They they like, loved in their emails. It's not just kind of like, Hey, do this thing, it's it's lovely greetings. It's how are you? It's like, Hey, I know you mentioned that you had this going on or or for us that being a swing, they always they're people from the industry to some capacity, so they know the tea. And so there are times when they're like, you might have rehearsal on this day, but like, let me know, and it's nice to feel that they aren't just plug and play. It's not just like we have a need and you're a product. It feels friendly, it feels comfortable, it feels like they really do see the relationship we're and in the two. And so that just makes me want to do work with them even more so all that about Broadway, plus definitely go check it out on their website. You can go on their social media as well and see a lot of the post they post about different and sometimes they do like show round ups is what I call them, but it's like they bring different, you know, bring the Elizas from all the companies together and they'll do a thing. And so you get that or the mean girls or wicked or whomever. And so there's so many cool opportunities. Go check out Broadway. Plus I feel free to book me. I would love to come work with the next generation of artists, current generation of artists.

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**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:04:27] I mean, listeners, when you scroll so many familiar names from the spot like Nik Walker, Fergie, Alex Brightman, Alex Brightman will will do a coaching one on one coaching session with you. In what world? Yeah, can you do this now? You can. Not an ad for Broadway Plus I'm just saying I think it's like it's amazing to bring things to bring these people in these experiences, to make them more accessible and also like pay you for your worth and your time and your expertize and you know you are doing you are a swing. You have been a dance captain. You know this. If I want to learn, I'm going to go to you because a lot of the people who are making decisions have never been a swing and a lot of them, I don't know, like Charlotte St. Martin, running your mouth about swings when you don't know shit about

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:05:07] Girl.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:05:09] go to the source

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:05:11] is what I'm saying. You know, it's wild. I also in real time, get to help. Like I said, reconstruct our thoughts on the industry. I did a masterclass two weeks ago where I worked with several students on pieces. They brought their piece. We workshop them. One of them in the Q&A that followed said out of his mouth, and I was so happy. He was this trusting in this bold and I was so happy for the opportunity for us to work into a new mindset together. He was like, So I looked at your resume and I was. So how did you become an actor? He was essentially saying, You've only danced and swung. How was your knowledge of acting this helpful? This dence, this this adequate, this, you know, whatever, because these students, when I tell you I was able to watch them really find themselves through these master classes because again, all I do is ask questions that allow you to find the answers. I'm not telling you what to do because I'm not your director. Like, I don't have a goal in mind. I ask you what your goal is. And so this one guy specifically was singing Stars. At the end of it found this version of him that was like no longer trying to be, you know, Colm Wilkinson or whomever, and it was very much him. He found the status in the role because he is literally six four, and I was like, You don't have to hold yourself. You're like, you're already tall. So trying to hold yourself in this

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way actually doesn't serve in the same way as you just being comfortable in the fact that you're taller than the average human. All that to say, he asked. You know, like, you're clearly such a great actor. You know, how did you become an actor when your whole resume seems to just be dancing? And I was like, Well, I went to dance roles because those were the jobs I was getting. It is not the entirety of my existence as an artist, my ability as an actor or my training. I actually think I'm a better actor than I am a dancer or a singer. But the jobs that I get because I've got other singing jobs, because my resume is swinging and things like that just kind of follow the progression, which I'm trying to break. Good heavens right now, but a lot of times I want to pay the bills. I want to build a resume. I want to work in the industry. So yes, I would, except go for audition for musicals and ensemble work when really what I would love to be doing is like a musical without dancing where I was an actor, a principle that just kind of sung and enacted or a stage play. But we went through this whole conversation of your job will never be the end or will rarely be the entirety of your ability. And it's up to us as artists to make sure we cultivate the full spectrum of ourselves, even if we are working a job that only kind of needs certain of our skills. So in Hamilton, I absolutely sing, dance and act. The thing that people notice more is the dancing. If I'm doing one of the feature parts, they notice the singing, but largely you will notice that I'm dancing. You won't realize that I've built an entire world for these people that I'm embodying. Your perceive that you're captivated by our performances, but you won't know that we did the work to be active because the whole thing is sung through and we're not aaron burr or Eliza as ensemble or as swings. So you just notice that we're dancing. So we all that to say, we went through this whole like, let's rethink artistry and ability. Let's not assume because I'm a swing that I am less talented than the onstage ensemble. And then let's not assume that because I'm in the ensemble, I'm not as capable of an actor as the principals. And let's not assume that because you haven't seen me as this role, that I'm not capable or able to play this role. Let's just ask the question What role do you want to play? Let's watch the performance. Is he acting as he's singing? Well, blah blah blah. And so it's allowing people to show you who they are as opposed to assuming who they must be.

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**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:08:48] Wow. So was that person receptive to what you're saying?

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:08:52] Absolutely. Yeah.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:08:53] like their question was valid. I have a whole career of ensemble swing work on my resume that didn't always allow people to notice if I was doing anything other than just singing nice and dancing good, you know? So I was not in any way shape or offended. Like I said, I was excited by the opportunity for us together to fight to navigate a new way of understanding because right now we're we're in another one of those moments where the industry is trying to. We're not the industry where the industry is actually fighting against the human interest of rebuilding, reconstructing, burning it down and finding something new. It's happened over for as long as our industry has existed. The humans who inhabit it have been trying to do better, and the industry has been stubborn. And so we're in another one of those moments. And I think while we absolutely need the front line, burn it down people to like, really be doing that hard work. I think we also need people to be fostering the new thought, the new way of thinking in the next generation. So for me, I think I'm so much better at having conversations and supporting people and broadening their understanding, or at least empathizing with themselves and others through that and through that journey. So I'm like, All right. Well, I will. I will talk about the burn it down, but I'm also going to make sure we have something to stand on once it's all burned down and we can rebuild with like minded humans.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:10:13] Yeah, to me, they go hand in hand. You can't have one without the other. You can't burn it down and then just have it be a bunch of rubble.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:10:18] Right, right.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:10:19] And you can't just have like pretty conversations either. Like it all. It all has to happen at once.

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**Christopher Henry Young** [00:10:25] And for me, I'm like, if I don't support the next group of people in understanding what is best for us all and moving that forward, who says I'm going to have the energy to rebuild myself? So be real helpful if the next generation of like whippersnappers with energy knew that maybe they shouldn't accept a \$200 paycheck on a, you know, a show that's asking them to break their bodies. So maybe if they're fighting that battle after I fought that battle, maybe we have more energy because I might not have the full energy to be rebuilding after we burn it down. And that's just the truth.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:10:58] Absolutely. Like all this, talk about swings lately. So now this is December 29th and we're recording. You won't come out until after the new year, but you know, the head of the Broadway League made those really shitty comments to super ignorant about how swings are. So she said something. I have it written down something about, like her education, she says. My educated guess is that the newer shows maybe have understudies that aren't as efficient in delivering the role as the lead is.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:11:20] Yes.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:11:21] She made choices, didn't she? She says some of the older shows have more experience, understudies and more experienced swings. I know one show last week where the lead was out, the understudy was on vacation, the swings were covering other parts and they just didn't have enough people to stand in. So the head of the Broadway League, her name is Charlotte St. Martin. You can, you know, Google or whatever you want to do. Has no idea what's happening, because this podcast has always been on the side of swings or superheroes, and I don't know how you do it and the shows wouldn't exist without you and how important it is. I mean, there are there swings too. Even when we're emailing, they're like, You want to talk to me like, I'm not a lead and I'm like, Fuck, yeah, I want to talk to the swings, all the swings. I think it's it's fascinating and incredible. But at the same time now, all these tweets and all these people are tweeting, you know, we really have to support our swings and they really keep the show running. And I'm like, That's great, and that's super true. But we should also like, take care of them that are like the industry should take care of

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them better because they are at risk a lot of the time. And to put all the pressure on swings to save the show all the time is pretty unfair, I think,

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:12:24] and I've been really trying to be as vulnerable and open as possible about the real things that I experience as a swing learning dense material, learning roles that are like in opposition of each other. That's that's actually bare bones. That is the thing I knew I was signing up for. Exactly. My abilities say that I am capable of learning six to 10 roles. I've done it for years. So when people assume that the hardest part of my job is that I want to help them understand that that is only one small known variable in what my experience is as a swing. The things that no one tells you about the things that are hard to navigate is the fact that I will never have the support and learning my roles that be on stage company ever has. Even if you're replacing in a show, you get one or two dance captains, a dance supervisor or choreographer in a room with just you giving you all the information in the world and then you get a full run through put in with the people that you'll be doing the show with consistently. If I get a full run through of the show, it is most often with spots missing. So then I have to make sure I'm ghosting through who's walking next to me. If I get a full run through, it will rarely have the lights that are important to me knowing where I'm going to be standing half the time. I will rarely have a costume, so I won't often remember how it feels to navigate the movement in these things. And then I'm often doing it with my other coverage standbys. So understudy counterparts who are rarely the people I'm interacting with. And then on top of that, most onstage company people by no real fault of their own. It's just again a symptom in some ways of the industry, a symptom of the relationship between on stage offstage and all the things that follow. But most of them actually aren't as giving to their fellow artist of a swaying cover as they would be to their fellow artists of an onstage person. So if I need you to recognize that my body is different, that I am not the partner you're used to each night and we need to have a conversation or a readjustment in how we move. It has been rare in my career that people are actually very open to that conversation. So I've learned to really speak up for what I need to be safe while really letting go of the things that would be nice to have. It

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would be nice for people to understand that I'm six foot one and most of their partners are five seven, five eight, and so we are going to feel different together. It would be nice for people who are used to having to lead themselves because they may not know that their partner is as good of a partner. For them to know that I have years of partner experience so you can actually give me your weight so that I'm not using parts of my body incorrectly because I can't feel your weight placement like it would be so nice for those things. And then on top of that, I navigate people. I navigate people daily who the microaggressions that are that are based in hierarchy of of of position are exhausting people saying things like, Oh my God, you're in the play today, you're in the play today, and I know what they mean. But its impact over intent, your impact is that you're making it seem like it is a lucky, lucky shooting star that I had the opportunity to be on stage today

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:15:36] to help out

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:15:37] to help out. You know, it feels when I hear those comments, it feels as though you don't value the hard work that I did to be able to be here in the first place. And it feels like you don't acknowledge that. Yes, I'm here and I'll probably do a very wonderful job. But the last time that I even touched this material was three months ago sometimes. And so it might be intended to be part of the camaraderie thing. But what it feels like in real time is like, you aren't really aware that you're speaking to another professional who's worked very hard to be in the same space that you're in. So when people say to me, you're in the play again, I say, Yeah, you are too girl

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:16:12] right

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:16:13] Like, really understand what you're saying. And so the things that are harder for me and then people consistently, we're in another moment where for a few weeks now, we'll get the tweets, we'll get the Instagram post about I was assuming, too, and then I'll go silent. I and I express this once before, and maybe not in the best way, but what I currently feel is I. It is less helpful to me to be consistently told that you believe you believe that. I'm a



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superhero, and it would be more helpful if you treated me like a valued coworker, like a functioning part of this system, like a partner, a scene partner. Those things would be more helpful than you telling me in passing or in an Instagram post. I see you your superhero because again, my rehearsal process is that in that book on stage company, people often get four to six weeks to learn one role. I sometimes get. Two weeks to learn, a roll in for four to eight hours of rehearsal time in space. Anything else is it left to me to do on my off time? And then in a month I'll do that role and then I'll repeat that process several times. And then in the midst of that, because shows are living entities and things morph that the archival video that I might have seen or the notes I got from a dance company, the supervisors may have changed six or seven different ways. And so then I have to make sure I am present enough to notice the show. And then if I have the energy, I'm still able to feel good and perform in a way that feels authentic to me. So that is navigating being a swing. To me, it is microaggressions. It is a lack of support. It is overperforming. When you are under undervalue, it is. And it is compensating for the lack of work from other people so that you can feel successful. It is consistently needing to prove yourself, even when the proof was proved, when the work was done by you getting the job. So I am very nervous and unsettled by this current moment of we see swings in air quotes because I'm not sure that it will do. It will then continue to do the real work. It is crazy to me that I make a for covering six rolls and holding six rolls of knowledge that I only make a few coins above. Put someone who is tasked with knowing one role. That is actually crazy to me. And it is not saying that anyone deserves less than they are currently making. It's saying that I do not feel valued for the work that I'm doing actually in my compensation. I find the gap between principle work, ensemble work and coverage pay and work is is crazy. It is wild to me that ensemble members who are on stage physically in it and are physically embodying the show longer than roles that are not are paid with such a gap in scale. If you're only onstage for 45 minutes of a three hour show, help me understand how your work. Is compensated in one way, while someone who's on stage for two hours and 15 minutes of that three hour show is not compensated for their work, the same because, again, it's not about someone making less. It's about people being accurately compensated and as a swing career wide

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dance captains are severely under compensated for the work they wind up doing. Having to restage shows when the pandemic says that they have to do split tracks for swings again, having to navigate the differences in partners. I might learn a partner, a section of a show where the entire station on the exact same combination. But then the intricacies of each individual coupling then means if there are four couples, I'm learning five different versions of the show, I'm learning the one that people think is happening on paper, that I'm learning the four individual versions because this partner works differently with this partner and so on and so forth. And then I'm tasked with holding all that information. And so when people say you're a superhero, you really don't know, actually. You really don't know. And having to having to keep myself as friendly in the face of people who don't make me feel good because here's the tea. It will be weeks between when I partner with a person who must trust me for us to do our job, but they don't know me in ways they did not anticipate. They hurt my feelings, they disrespect me. And yet I have to navigate when are moments and how do I advocate for myself while still allowing you the space to be able to trust me when I have to go on in the middle of the show? And you haven't seen me in months? It is an unearned relationship because we also we also don't spend time together building camaraderie in the same way that onstage companies do, or that onstage companies are together. So if I haven't seen you in months and the last time I saw you, you were saying like, Oh yeah, you get to do the thing today. That's the last memory I have in my mind. And yet I have to ramp it up in some way to go like you on stage and respect you as an artist and feel good about our working together so that you can trust me enough to hold you over that, over my head in the air. Those are the things to me that no one tells you about swinging that are the most difficult and that I wish people really understood when they say, I see you, you superhero.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:21:25] Yeah, yeah. I mean, so what can the industry do better? Two part question What can the industry do better from within and what can non performers like me do better? Who use that word superhero all the time and who mean it, really? But is there a better way to ask you questions about your life and your job? That is just a more productive way or a

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way that maybe doesn't sting because the last thing on Earth I want to do is harm in any way.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:21:55] Sure.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:21:56] So from the out, from the outside and from the inside, how can we all do better here?

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:22:01] Well, and let's start with the second part of that question actually, what everyday people can do, I think from my perspective, at least, is. Kind of normalize the process, as I think you have in my experience thus far with you here, like you're different because of your knowledge of the industry and of swings. You actually function in a way that is like a better bridge gap between what is happening at large and what we wish were happening in that. A lot of your questions are just questions you could ask any artist, regardless of their title. So when people are sometimes thinking about it, they really do think, think of us. Some people still think of us as the second best self as the person. Not as good as Patti LuPone, as a person, not as good as Julius Thomas, you know, things like that. And so a lot of people do think in that way. So it's recognizing that every professional artists that you encounter has auditioned and worked to some capacity to get there. So when you ask the questions, maybe, maybe not allowing the question to be colored in to be tinted by the perception of they are not X, Y and Z because they're a swing cover understudy. Stand by. And remember that we are all valued artists, so that's what everyday people can do. They can also know truly what the work is of a swing. They can when they see that a cover is on a swing, is on an understudy stand as on in their playbill with the insert. Let's not assume that we're getting a second best performance because often you're not in the real tea is doing eight shows a week is hard and navigating. Making it new for every performance is hard. But you know what is helpful when you're not doing the show every day is that every time is new and you don't actually know when the next time you're going to do it is. So you often are a fresher take, and that has nothing to do with anyone's capabilities or professionalism and everything to do with reality. Every time I go on for a role, I want it to be new because it does new. The last role I did was probably a different role. And the next time

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I do it, who knows the crystal ball can only tell us. And so really understanding that you're getting a trained artist every time, regardless of who's in the role? That's what everyday people could do.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:24:14] Yeah, because I remember even I mean, that's also sort of been what has ended up a goal of this podcast. Like from the very beginning, it was just, I want to talk about this thing and let's see where it goes. And then very early on, it became these I mean, frantic emails about, Oh my god, I have to see it before Lin goes, Oh my God, the original cast is starting to leave. Oh my God, is it worth seeing? And it became this phrase that I used to say that I will say every day the show is the show is the show. First of all, the show is great. It's on the on paper. It's pretty damn good. So don't worry about that. And two, they're not pulling me off the street and saying, do the Yorktown dance break every single person on the set, which is like a dream that I could just do it like flawlessly, which I could wake up and I just do it. I'm not up there for a reason because every single person on the stage under the stage next to the stage in the front of everyone knows what the fuck they're doing. Don't worry about it. And how about this? Be excited when you open an insert, maybe see a name you don't know. What are they going to do with Jefferson? Who's who's this Eliza? What is she going to do? That is fun. Like when I I mean, sometimes the theaters don't have inserts anymore because they're going green, which I support. Like when you go in and you see the I'm almost, I'm like, ravenous. It's like an itch I can't scratch. Like, who is it? Who has, Oh my god, am I got over the last time I saw go, he was Washington, and now he's Burr. That's exciting. That's what theater is. That's the whole point.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:25:41] And seeing on a scene original companies like the original Broadway company are seeing, the full onstage cast is a beautiful novelty. Truly, you get to say, and I live for them and I love that. I myself loved that when I saw Patti LuPone in Gypsy, I got to say I saw Patti LuPone in Gypsy. But it wasn't of my perspective on the show would not have changed had I seen Patti LuPone as understudy. You know, that's the difference. Sometimes it can feel like people's whole view of the experience is tinted differently if

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and when they find out that the person that they're seeing was a swing stand by her understudy. And so to that, and what everyday people can do is actually know the difference between a swing, a understudy and a stand by. Because the blanket term is cover, we all cover other roles. But the difference functionally between an understudy, a standby and a swing. And yeah, there are tons of kind of gray areas to those definitions. But at large swings are offstage, often sometimes on stage multiple person covers of the ensemble, so they will cover multiple roles from the ensemble. Understudies are often on or off stage covers for principal roles they often understudy principal roles on or offstage. Standbys are usually most often one to one a alternate, if anything, but recently they've been kind of becoming multiple person covers for the principals, but largely I find. Those definitions to be closer to the truth. And I wish more people understood that because in Hamilton, for instance, in the five companies in that in North America. And I would argue across the world, you will rarely see the full on stage company for no other reason other than Hamilton is a very challenging show. We are doing them in changing climates in the midst of a full personal lives during a pandemic. So. Making it through six months in having this, the whole onstage roster at four is a rarity anyway. It's a novelty if people get to see that. Mostly just because the show is challenging. Life is life and we are navigating both. People have vacations, they have personal dates, people get married. All the things six days. And so I want everyday people to know that what the industry can do is really stop working off of this early 1980s, 1970s version of the industry. We still contract, in my opinion, in ways that think shows function the way Hello Dolly did, whether or not to big dance numbers in a few company numbers of walking around. Hamilton is a two and a half give or take hour show where the dance ensemble, the movement acting dancing ensemble, is onstage for upwards of 90 percent of the show. That is not Hello Dolly. The dancing that we're doing in shows like Hamilton and shows like King Kong, what it was like, the movement that people are doing at King Kong when it was on Broadway. The movement that people would do it back in shows that were like contact. Or are that Twyla Tharp show come fly away? Like what the. It is not. Step touch. It is not every third dance number. It is the show. And so compensate, interact, acknowledge people as such the best thing. One of the best things that Hamilton does for the culture

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of the show and for the relationship of how we perform the show is that it's a company.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:29:16] Mm-Hmm.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:29:17] The entirety of the bow as a company bow because the show is a company bow like the show is an ensemble piece and an ensemble in the Big E version of it, where the entire company of actors are the ensemble. And so to pretend as though any one piece of the puzzle is less worthy, less. Efficient than anything else would actually be allied to the thing that people see. So it's one of the best things that they do is a company bow. And while I certainly understand the hierarchy, barrels is what I call them, where you have the men's ensemble in the women's ensemble, then the supporting roles and I I understand it, I really do. But then I really do ask who? Why, why is the line up? The line up 42nd Street is a show that does an encore at the end for the dance ensemble because of how much they're doing in the show. So they they bow first, they go off to a costume change, all the principals come through and bow, and then they have this reprise of we're in the money mash up that they do to acknowledge that the show is the dance ensemble. And that was way ahead of its time in its day to bring the ensemble back. To have the final word is nuts. It's crazy, they tell you, but it really does acknowledge that the show is the show and the show is the work that you're seeing. And for that show and for our show, the entirety of the show needs to be acknowledged at once for the work we are all doing for that two and a half plus hours. So the industry can really start deconstructing and rebuilding the way we work, their shows out there that really do, you know, pee on your leg and tell you it's raining as far as how you're treated, as far as the work level that you're doing versus the compensation that you're getting. It really is wild to me that we are begging for pennies more when we are doing so much work. It is wild to me that a that the head of the Broadway League makes an exorbitant amount of money to not know what swings and understudies and standbys do.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:31:18] To say educated, guess to say educated, my educated guess as the head of the Broadway League. And then the words that followed were that bullshit

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**Christopher Henry Young** [00:31:30] and you just proved that you weren't that educated at the thing you're supposed to be the most educated about

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:31:34] It's like Charlotte. You pronounced shitty assumption wrong? It's not an educated guess. It was a bad assumption. It was. It was completely ignorant and ridiculous. And I think it really speaks to the fact that swings are completely taken for granted because I think there's this this vibe of like, that's the gig, that swing life, that's what it is like.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:31:56] it really is that conditioning.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:31:57] And, you know, like, OK, so you don't know what you're doing today, like, that's kind of part of it. Welcome to the job. That's what a swing is. And it's like, Oh shit, that's not OK. One, Does it have to be? And you know what?

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:32:07] My in my mom and I had this conversation and our mom, she's she's been my number one supporter. But because she didn't come from the professional arts world in any capacity, she didn't know either. For years, she used to say to me, like, Are you in the show today? And that would break me every time, every time, because what it unintentionally does, what it what it's attempting to do again, intent over impact, over intent. And so what it intends to do is like, hopefully, you're on stage showing your talent today. What it actually does is not acknowledge that I get paid to maintain six different versions of a two and a half plus hour show in their entirety and then at a moment's notice. And I'm well and good known up in the Hamiltons for being a mid-show swingin moment, having to go on stage and be as close to impeccable as I know how to be after the show has started while I was sitting back there watching YouTube videos.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:33:00] Right, right, right. To instantly get into that headspace of instantly like, it's like a switch, yes.

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**Christopher Henry Young** [00:33:06] And then again, navigate the interpersonal workings of a professional environment that is challenging. And so all all that to say, there really does need to be a reexamination and a reallocation of responsibility. A, it's a frightening amount of the people with their hands on the knobs, the people who are supposed to be our liaisons, abdicates and whomever have no idea what doing professional theater in 2021-22 is like because they don't. The last moment some of them did was yesteryear was many moons ago, and that's not to say anything other than you actually do not have the full knowledge to be fighting for anyone to be advocating for anyone. You're you're not you're not that person for us, unfortunately. So either really go listen to the people you're working on behalf of. Really hear them or move out of the way and go find another another adventure for you. Because, right? I say all the time and I use this. For argument's sake, a multiple time Tony winner will have no idea what an ensemble swing goes through. In today's industry and right now, industry, unless they are directly in contact with one of them, even still, it's a second hand. Information gathering mission. And so when I listen to the heads of movements being people who in my perspective, are not directly affected by the worst of it, it can be challenging because I go, we are only as healthy as our least healthy person. That's a saying that I've heard it all all over the place, you know, most recently from our company manager. And it really does ring true to me that in our industry, we are only as healthy as at least healthy person. So let's take the union sector of professional work for, for instance, we are only as healthy as that is the first union contract second regional theater in the middle of nowheresville actresses. So take what the swing. Doing, you know, name at dinner theater and nowhere, nowhere America, what they're going through, that is how healthy our industry is actually. It is not as healthy as what the principle of a currently running what I call government show because they have no intention of closing any time soon. Musical on Broadway is going through. You are actually not the best spokesperson for these movements. My friend. You mean? Well, but unfortunately, you're not even I, though I like to think that I hold on to my journey in a way that makes it ever present. I am a Broadway actor now. I am far removed from my non-eq roots in certain ways and everything I do to hold on to it so that I can



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abdicate for it is largely dependent on me hearing and advocating for and with the people who are still in that space. But I'm not the best spokesperson for it. I can tell you in real time what it's like working on that non-eq of that musical that's on its third leg, you know, so sometimes we really do have to look at who's speaking about what and try to make it as functional as possible. And I think the industry is always at war with keeping up with itself. That's actually the thing that I feel is true about my entire, my entire career. I believe that's true that the industry. Is dependent on its own progress, and yet it fights its own progress because the face of the industry and I don't mean actors as the face, I mean the actual face the name Broadway is the face of professional of the professional theater world, right? Broadway will always do the new fun thing people do box musicals, 90 jukebox musicals, you know. People want Real Housewives onstage. Every one of them gets a musical. But at the same time, they won't listen to the very people keeping it moving. They won't hear that people, black people or people that don't adhere to the gender binary are demanding the space they deserve. And in I say, all they have to do is give them that space those people deserve and watch the industry thrive. But instead, they're like, No, the old way that's clearly dying. It'll still work. We know that way. We're going to keep that weight going. So instead of doing what would be arguably less work and allowing people to have space, you want to do more work by trying to create shows that we're not interested in seeing anymore. Always, that war was keeping up with itself. Crazy to me.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:37:46] Yeah, I'm just thinking of certain shows that were on Broadway this season and maybe one Tonys that

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:37:55] heavens that nobody asked for

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:37:58] and are like actually harming the trans community. Like, I just don't.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:38:01] Wild.

[00:38:02] I'll say jagged little pill

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:38:05] Wild. It's there.

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**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:38:06] You know, it's like it's winning Tonys. And I was like, Wait, what? Like, I just it's just a little and yeah, no one asked for it. And I just there's there's been so much harm done. And of course, no one wants people, especially now to be out of work. That's not that's not the goal. It's not it.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:38:24] We're asking people to be responsible because jagged little pill, as it was, could have been more responsible with how it navigated the relationship of having a character who was trans and non-binary or whatever it was intended or was, and really be responsible about hiring it. This whole idea that the actor didn't exist is a lie.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:38:43] It's a lie. It's a

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:38:44] lie. And so just and this is the nuance of it. Again, we can we can love a show and acknowledge that the show was not as responsible as it should have been. I still, to this day, love a chorus line. I do think the fact that they will only ever let the largely productions have a Connie is clearly going to be Asian. Richie is always going to be black. Hmm. Right outside of that we go, Oh, look at this edgy casting when someone else is a person of color. Right? And so I can hold a Chorus Line in high esteem and be in love the show and also have a nuanced discussion and criticism of the fact that largely productions do think it's edgy when they're casting someone who is just appropriate for the part, regardless of the physical body they inhabit. And so when we have these conversations about shows and in again, Hamilton is a is a wonderful example in the moment of acknowledging itself and progressing. What did I miss? Mm hmm.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:39:45] Yeah, absolutely.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:39:46] We've discussed and most people are aware that what? Yes. And what I miss has a restaging. It's a more responsible handling of the narrative. And they went through several months of conversations about how to handle that with the companies and blah blah blah. And yes, it's still not a perfect entity for depending on who you are.

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But it is proof that you can adapt, that you can acknowledge a misstep and progress past it and be better for it. The new What did I miss? Feels good to perform for me because it allows me to acknowledge the elephant that is not even the elephant in the room, it is the elephant that is the room like, what I miss is the elephant. And so to be able to see on stage through it, through how I see the number now that not everyone agreed with how this human existed and the people who were at the mercy of his existence navigated it to the best of their ability. That is what I get to see when I watch and perform what I miss now. And then it sets me up as an actor in the ensemble that then navigate the next few scenes when we're in cabinet battles where I may or may not agree with Hamilton or Jefferson or whomever. And so this new what I miss is am I in my experience thus far very responsible? And who knows in a month I might. See a new shade of it that I go, Ooh! Room for improvement. But here's the other thing that's true the theater industry presently is lousy at giving job descriptions. So I as a doctor, if I were a doctor, I assume I would never go in to a job listing that said Surgon. And then all of a sudden, be doing. Pediatric flu shots, as far as my only work in the theater industry, I often go in only knowing that is a dance show in the ensemble. I don't know that I'm signing up to be like, for instance, with with with Hamilton. Originally, I was not fully aware that I was signing up for that to be a black person in a show where the top of Act one were all embodying enslaved humans. And we're not all the descendants of enslaved humans. I was not fully aware of that. Had I been aware of that, I might have made different choices as to what I did or did not do to be in certain shows. And that's just my Hamilton example.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:41:59] Can you explain that a little more?

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:42:00] Yeah, I when I saw the show back in 2015, I auditioned for the show in 2017. Those are the two gaps in between it. So I saw the show. I couldn't tell you. I really remember what I miss. And I also couldn't tell you that I necessarily knew that that Monticello. I'm a product of the American education system. I didn't know Monticello. I didn't really understand it was a plantation. So when I was watching the no, I wasn't, though, the information was there. I will give

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that credit. The information was there in the No. I want to be in Monticello. Like, I actually was not fully aware that we were said it was possible that that we were set on a plantation and that some of the cast members are very much not the descendants of enslaved humans. So that information is not always something packaged in offer to you in your audition notice. And in Hamilton is not exempt from. They're not the thing I'm picking on. I'm just in Hamilton. Every show does this. You sign up for shows that are developed on its feet in real time as you rehearse them. And so what might have been a lindy hop in the audition might all of a sudden become a very seductive tango? And you're like, Ah! And I don't know that I have the space to go. Can we get a intimacy specialist in here? I don't know that I'm super comfortable here. And this is what I mean by sometimes the information is not available for me to make an informed decision about how I navigate my space. And so there are people that might sign up for shows because the version that they saw might have had a identity that they agreed with shown. And then they got there. And all of a sudden, that is not the case. And then you're like, I signed the contract. I'm in rehearsal, I'm getting a paycheck. I don't know what to do, and I just wish we were a little bit more responsible with what we are actually being asked of by by the industry. Because we are in a time where we're how we exist is is more important, I believe, than it might have been in other times because of how much we know now, so too to continuously disrespect our trans communities as as the artists that they are and to completely. To continue to not acknowledge their worth as artists and their ability to be performing whatever role they're able to perform is harmful, and I really want us as an industry to get past this idea that there is no room for growth, nuance or discussion around how roles are done. And yet we have this new company, you know, leading player in Pippin. You know, these roles that they have gender swapped or gender bent, and that's like a nice start to it. But I'm talking about the conversations of when we go, this person went in to audition. This person will wear the dress in the wig. This person will wear the suit and in the bow tie. This person will hit the notes and act the scene. And then we allow that to be what it is. And then next to that, we create shows where the narrative is. This person living as this person. It is saying that these identities love and feel and exist as well. It's too part. It's not. It's not, you know, pushing identities to the

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fringe and saying, all we must do are kinky boots for a real life drag queen to ever do our drag queen role in a show.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:45:23] Right, right, right. Totally.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:45:24] You know, and it's not saying it's also saying like, we have to have a gay love story for a gay person to be an actor in a show like these are the things I want us to progress past as an industry, as a society.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:45:36] And so instead of making that their identity, the non-binary person in the show, that's all they are.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:45:43] Right? As opposed to a person who is known binary or person who is black. Right. This and this is the conversation that I think happens a lot more often now than it used to. People of certain identities their identity is often before their humanness while other people get to exist as human first. And I really am about like we are human first. And because of society, like if someone were to ask me to like name my identities, I would often say I am a black gay man. You will see that I am black. If I'm just standing there saying nothing, you will see that I'm black, depending on how tight my pants are, what my outfit is. You may not necessarily assume my my gender, but you will see that I'm black and I am gay. I'm married and you. If you look at my social media, you will see my husband. So you can assume and know that I'm gay and that I identify as a as a man as he him. But often that's how people try to qualify me or ask me to qualify myself, as opposed to being like, Hi, I'm Christopher the black. Oh my God, my black friend. Oh my God, that gay actor. You know, those are the things that are, like, truly exhausting and super harmful, I think, to the progress of our industry. In some ways that we really are not about trying to expand our acknowledgment of the spectrum of humanity.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:47:04] That's yeah. I mean my. Very, very limited experience with that, and I guess this is going to be the first time I'm saying it on the Hamilcast, but I said it on true crime obsessed. I'm bisexual, but I'm married to a cis man. And I for a long, long time, like a cis het man. And so for a

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long, long time, I felt like that was I couldn't say that because I married Mike. And so. Then I'd have to answer for what that means to be bi, and I don't want to deal with it, and I felt like it was too far gone and I didn't. I wasn't allowed in that space. And so it's been like great to be public about, I guess, who I am and that's been wonderful. And it's it's nothing changes because it's always how I felt and I've just now saying it and it's been great. But there have been a couple of conversations where it's like, No, you're not. I'm like, Oh, OK, well, this conversation's over. I don't need to, go into that. So that's not to hijack any of this. No, no. Very limited.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:48:07] It's a real experience, though bi-erasure is the thing.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:48:10] Yeah, and it's a limited experience and it's still new. But that's something that happened. Kind of. I was like excited to say it to somebody and they're like, Well, no, like, how does that? That's no, it's wild. Like, Oh, oh, OK, all right. It's not. It doesn't matter. What does it matter to you? That's not.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:48:27] And this is one of the things I think I learned from Hamilton. The whole who lives, who dies, who tells the story of it all is that Hamilton reminds me the show reminds me constantly to be the own teller of my story first. Because this is what it's what I'm receiving for what you're saying and what it connects to, what I was expressing right before that is that so often other people are trying to tell us who we are and tell our story in the process. Mm hmm. Yeah. With no information, with a limited education on all of the matter. And so I want to be able to tell my story and to be the order of my experience and I will rail against anyone. And this is why you'll often hear me use terms from like in my experience or in my opinion, because I want to qualify. That is not the gospel of the world. It is not the rule. It is simply the things that I believe. I know that I believe I know even that statement because I might hear some information that might help me believe something different tomorrow. But I'm telling my story, my perspective on my career, on swinging on Hamilton, on my marriage, on life in America is largely based in real life experience corroborated by the collection of others who have

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frighteningly similar experiences. Mm hmm. And then again, I navigate the conversation with myself of really trying to debate my experience to see what what I believe happened and what I believe I know and learn on the other side of it all that other stuff. But in our industry and in the world, I don't know why it is up with other people trying to tell other people's stories without any respect for the person whose story they're trying to tell. And so when we talk about erasure, when we talk about people combating you, speaking for yourself, I'm like, What right do you have? What do you know of the matter? So if I say this is what swinging is like, if you say I'm bisexual and someone goes, No, what do they know? What is my response to that individual, not to you, but to that individual to combat my, our experiences? Please enlighten me with your wealth of knowledge. You know, ventilate the belfry of your mind, please.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:50:51] First of all, how appropriate that I'm wearing my Teerico who tells your story? but again, not an ad, but TeeRico.Com, they're the best. but no. Also also saying something. I've had this conversation before and something that sticks out. Deontay Goodman, who is in the Broadway company and this conversation was years ago, but it's the same thing, someone he was telling an experience that he had about racism and microaggressions and being a black queer man. And he was telling me about a story where a white woman was like, Well, I don't well, I don't know about that. Like, suddenly, because her experience wasn't his experience, then suddenly his experience can't be a thing. And what we were discussing and what we what came out and this is sort of the same thing as like, well, just because I tell you something, I'm not really taking comments at this time. I'm just telling you what my experience is. So for you to talk about what it is to be a swing and to learn something like things you said, you know about the lighting, right? Like know having to know where the lighting is. And I'm sitting here as you're telling me that story, I'm like, first of all, that never occurred to me, but also that's on you to remember or study up on or get the resources

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:52:01] in and just to give credit where credit is due. Please, when that does happen in my current circumstance, it's often my stage manager is wonderful. She's impeccable in that way in my career. Part of why I am so shocked

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by my current circumstance is because of how different is it for my career? So like with Hamilton, you know, Kim Fisk, our stage manager, she is really impeccable about like, this is a light for you. But being told there's a light in getting to see the light or two different things and historically in my career, rarely are people like this is where the light is. Sister like that is not the thing that happens. And then again, part of this part of the acknowledgment of reality that I attempt to do that combats toxic positivity. While again, remembering that we're only as healthy as our least healthy person is that if I as a swing and even talking to another swing. Sometimes the well, it's not that bad of it all really is not acknowledging the spectrum of experiences, and me speaking about my bad experience is not ever going to be met to say that your good experience can exist.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:53:05] Everything can be true at once.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:53:07] Multiple things are mostly true at once. And so if I'm sitting here saying I feel unsupported as a swing in the industry and you have actually, let's say you and I are in the conversation for arguments and you have been that swing that's like, I've loved swinging since the day it started, and you really do agree and enjoy that process. If asked what my experience is and your response would ever be. Yeah, but that's just that's just what it is that is toxic and those conversations happen too often. What really needs to be the new thing is, here's what's true if a person who has always loved swinging. Supports someone who is feeling unhealthy in the current state of swinging. I can't imagine that the progress would actually negatively impact a person who loves swinging because again, what I'm not asking, for instance, being a multiple person cover is the job. While I think 12 rolls to cover in a show is nuts. I do think six seven eight is understandable for the job. You know, I then think compensation should be appropriate. That is a progress that would benefit all the people. Even if you always love swing, I doubt you've loved not being compensated, right?

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:54:24] What I would say to that person who loves swinging, you think you love it now? Just wait. So all



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of all of this progress happens, then you're really going to have a good time at work if you love it.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:54:33] Wait until you get an entire rehearsal process. You're going to live for it like that. So, so to me, I really do want us all to really make a positive step. Pace forward in recognizing that we have to acknowledge reality. We have to combat toxic positivity, and we really do have to function based on the health of our least healthy person in certain conversations, because that is why that is how I'm convinced we will progress. A little better is by really going like, OK, I might love being on Broadway, but Broadway has a lot of flaws.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:55:14] Totally.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:55:15] The two are true at the same time.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [00:55:16] Yeah. And I think a lot another stigma two in the industry and acting in general, not just the Broadway industry, but just like I haven't earned the right to complain or to be here. And this toxic positivity of this is how it is. And I'll just I'll just deal with it is is people assume like, I can't rock the boat or I will get fired or never work again. And there is that objective.

**Christopher Henry Young** [00:55:38] That is based in reality, unfortunately. But here's the thing is that the amount of people who have been branded and from my understanding of this, this is actually a thing that happens to women more than men in our industry, for my understanding, is that being branded difficult to work with when what actually happened? Is you abdicating for a need you had as a working artist is lousy across this industry or being cold? Oh, they're difficult or whiny or whatever when all you were asking for is often actually, in my experience, the thing I've been abdicating for most often is for someone to do their job. I've rarely been advocating for someone to do above their job. So like I, I don't think I've ever I don't think I've ever been that actor who has gone to a stage manager and asked them to hang the moon in seconds. Sure. But sometimes I have asked to schedule a rehearsal for me to do this thing that keeps

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going wrong on stage. This lift that seems dangerous. I have asked of my union to abdicate for us to be able to make sure our coverage teams get appropriate and adequate in efficient rehearsals so that they are not in physical danger. But some would say that I'm asking for too much and I think that is wild. Actually, that is wild. And while I'm knowledgeable enough about our industry and our contractual obligations to understand that it actually is a minefield of navigating. So if I were to go to my stage manager and be like, I need the next rehearsal, what they have to navigate legally with time and budget and the seven other unions in one building to get that rehearsal to happen is actually the least functional thing for our industry as a whole. Because again, we're on so many different unions that the band and the pit and the wardrobe and the onstage and the directors and the like, we're on so many different unions. So then you have to navigate. If I say I would like a rehearsal to have full tech and costumes, what my stage manager and company manager, what happened? Navigate to make that happen. If they can make it happen, it's super human. And so that to me, is a problem that they would have to go through such hoops to get me the thing that I should be able to have anyway. And it would make it, I think, culturally and by cultural, I mean the culture of a show. It would make it a much healthier environment if everyone could trust that we were all as prepared and capable as possible. And I don't often think that it's true. I don't think everyone is often as capable and I don't think everyone is often as prepared in the conversation about capability and appropriate casting. That could be a movie in and of itself, because there are times, unfortunately, where the politics of casting of our industry mean that you are up against some real sticky navigational tools when it comes to how we perform a show, right? I've worked on shows where the people that we're swinging with me were first time swings. There are certain shows that I would not wish that on my worst enemy to be a first time swing on a show like that, depending on the show. I would never wish that because because you are set up for stress, swinging at it's base is stressful. If you've never done it before and you're on a difficult show. Yikes. On bikes, that is not fun. And so asking for people to be able to be as prepared as possible because it is my belief that the actual embodiment of what a swing can do most people could do. A lot of people talk as though like, you got to be a unicorn. I think both professional

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artists actually could learn six rolls of of material. I think that's largely true. Navigating the other stuff that I've been talking about that is where the unicorns come in, being able not to touch that material in real space for months and then go on and execute it. That is the unicorn of it all. And I wish people would stop thinking actually that the physical learning of six rolls makes me. That just makes me an artist. Because while, yeah, I have to learn six rolls and that is absolutely difficult and and very challenging. And then if you dare to try to make each of those roles unique in different ways, that that is superhuman. But more of us are actually capable of that than we know. And a lot of times some of us get pigeonholed as swings because we believe that no one else can do it. And I'm like, That's not true. I might be able to do it in in these real harmful circumstances. So to make the circumstances better, your money will go further. Honestly, producers, if if the circumstances of how we learned the show were better, your money would go a lot further. Your swings would not leave to go to other shows so often. Maybe they wouldn't keep wanting to be in different roles so often. And I think sometimes what I am most interested in, I will. I will speak about an advocate for the the thing that my brain scene sees currently. But I am sore about just being at the table with people from other sections of the conversation to say, OK, the thing I currently see is absolutely not the only way. It's just the way I see you right now. So let's have a discussion. Let's really talk about this. If, though, if the issues with what I'm asking for is money time, other unions, let's bring the people responsible for time, money and other unions to the table and let's have a conversation. But again, not having a conversation with the people who are not with the Charlotte St. Martin, who clearly have no idea.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [01:01:03] No idea.

**Christopher Henry Young** [01:01:04] Have the conversations with the people like now, like me, like you. Like the people who the actors who are in the thick of it, who also have been experienced enough in the industry in these capacities to actually be a better advocate for them because that's also another part of the problem. Some of the people with the most notoriety are actually not the best to carry the torch. They're

# THE HAMILCAST

## EPISODE 305 CHRISTOPHER HENRY YOUNG 2 TRANSCRIPT

the best people to look good on the poster with the torch. And that's important because, you know, getting getting the message out there is important. But as far as who's like drafting for things and abdicating for the contracts, sometimes you really do need those worker bees to be the louder voices.

**Gillian Pensavalle** [01:01:54] So we all have our assignments. We're good to go. OK, great. Next week, I'm wrapping up with Christopher Henry Young, and he shares more about his process of joining Hamilton, the launch of the And Peggy company pre Puerto Rico, his favorite moments in the show. And of course, he's taking questions from the Patreon Peeps. So until then, stay safe. Stay healthy. Thank you so much for listening. I love you. I'm G. Pen.

[01:02:51] The Hamilcast is brought to you by my love of the thing TM and my complete lack of chill, please join me in raising all the glasses to Sir Alex Lacamoire for generously making my intro music and this custom Yorktown arrangement that I will never, ever get over. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. To become a patreon peep and join the best, kindest and most welcoming corner of the Internet, go to Patreon dot com, slash the Hamilcast. You can submit questions to guests, join Zoom Hangouts, get behind the scenes access and of course, my unending gratitude. I'm at the Hamilcast on all social media and you can listen wherever you get your podcasts. Visit the Hamilcast dot com for transcripts, episodes and more. You can see what's going on with Mike. You know Mike at Michael Paul Smith dot net. True Crime Obsessed is my true crime comedy podcast with my podcast soul mate Patrick Hinds of Theater People and Broadway BackStory fame. Thank you so much for listening. It means the world to me, to the revolution