

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 318 WESLEY RYAN 1 TRANSCRIPT

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

Gillian Pensavalle [00:00:18] Hello, everyone, welcome back to the Hamilcast, I'm Gillian, and today I am joined by the one and only Wesley Ryan from the Angelica company. Hi. Hello. Hello, hello. How are you? And of course, Odie's here.

Wesley Ryan [00:00:30] Obviously, he's meowing somewhere in the corner. I am. I'm doing well. It's a gloomy Wednesday here on tour, but we are. We're loving it.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:00:40] Great. Before we get started. Can you tell me your pronouns, please?

Wesley Ryan [00:00:43] My pronouns are he/they.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:00:45] Wonderful. Thank you so much. Where are you right now?

Wesley Ryan [00:00:49] We are currently on tour in Houston, Texas. We just got here on Monday from Little Rock, Arkansas.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:00:55] So you are in the ensemble on the Angelica tour? You, man one, right?

Wesley Ryan [00:00:59] I am the first man.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:01:01] The first. Yes. The first man.

Wesley Ryan [00:01:04] Yes. Yes, yes.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:01:05] Yes. Yes. Regional Productions In the Heights. West Side Story Little Mermaid 13. Oh, of course we've discussed. So if people are like, Who's Odie? First of all, who's Odie? Get your act together. You and Odie went viral for being adorable. Odie is your cat.

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Wesley Ryan [00:01:19] my cat, my bengel cat. Yes, I posted a selfie blooper reel of Odie interrupting me, and the internet took it and ran with it. It was. It was crazy.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:02:40] Can I ask you before we get to the Hamilton stuff and all of that? What is it like going viral? It seems terrifying.

Wesley Ryan [00:02:47] Yeah. I don't think no one really prepares you for what a viral video

Gillian Pensavalle [00:02:52] like Christopher Meloni to be retweeting you. Oh my gosh. I mean, you got listeners. If you don't know when I say viral, I mean, like Odie has thirty four thousand Instagram followers.

Wesley Ryan [00:03:01] It's got more than me. What a jerk.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:03:03] Everyone on Earth, Chris Maloney, like I said, like like that must be very scary.

Wesley Ryan [00:03:07] The irony of it is that I was auditioning for the new Law & Order revamp.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:03:13] Yes, my husband auditioned for that.

Wesley Ryan [00:03:15] That's what my self-pity was for. And then when Chris Wallace was like, Come on, Chris, come on. Give me on the show. Yeah. But yeah, I woke up one morning. The weird part is that it blew up about a month after I posted it, so I posted it. My friends laughed. We laughed. It was great. Put it to rest and I wake up one day and I'm like, Why do I have like, like 1100 more followers? I was like, What did I do? Like, how do you scroll? Not even knowing, not even knowing what's going on? I was like, I hope I didn't say something wrong. This mark turns around and saw the same. But yeah, then as I saw him like input, I got on Twitter and that's all it really blew up. And it just kept going and going and going. I'm very thankful it's the gift that keeps on giving, really?

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Gillian Pensavalle [00:03:58] it's the one of the cutest or most wholesome ways to be famous for a little on the internet

Wesley Ryan [00:04:04] and the internet was so nice to me. That was the crazy part. No one had anything bad to say. I think the worst comment was like basically that I set it up that I like made Odie do this, and I was like, Oh yeah, because like, we all know how easy cats are to control like. But that was like the meanest thing anyone had to say about us on the internet. And I was I was actually very touched at how nice. Yeah, the millions of people who saw the video were I did change my Facebook name. No, because like people were like I had like like 4000 friend requests on Facebook from people that I don't know, mostly cat ladies who just wanted to let me know that they loved.

Wesley Ryan [00:04:43] Correct. Correct. And if I ever need a babysitter that you know, right

Gillian Pensavalle [00:04:46] Sheryl in Missouri is totally right.

Wesley Ryan [00:04:49] And I was like, You know, next time I'm there, Sheryl, you can go on ahead

Gillian Pensavalle [00:04:52] because you might be like, you never

Wesley Ryan [00:04:53] know at this point, you know, I really should be. We're all over.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:04:56] I'm glad you had a wonderful experience on the internet. That's usually not how it goes. So I'm like,

Wesley Ryan [00:05:02] exception to that rule, for sure.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:04] I said, You know, when we you jumped on the I, I use this site called Riverside, not an ad. There are no ads, but that's the site we use. So when you're when you jumped on the camera, I was almost your smile is so beautiful. I'm just going to say it, and I made a joke. I was like, Do people tell you that when you appear, things are just better, like people have better days? And I said, this is going to sound like a threat because on Dateline, when they say that you light up a room that's like a death wish, but you

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light up the room and I'm not even in the room you're in, so I don't mean it as a threat.

Wesley Ryan [00:05:34] And now that is the sweetest thing. Listen, if I can get murdered for this smile, I'm doing something right, I guess.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:39] And you went viral and survive.

Wesley Ryan [00:05:41] Yeah, see, oh my gosh, that's luck should just run with it.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:05:47] So, yeah, you're you're art. You are also a little famous on the internet because you have a lot. Your Tik Tok is hilarious and you're just very good at social media.

Wesley Ryan [00:05:56] I don't know if it's really good at social media or if I just don't care what I appear as on social media. So the silliness is able to like, like when you take it too seriously, that's when it all like goes downhill. And very much like, Oh, I'm going to post this video and see what happens. And sometimes I get 21 likes and sometimes I get twenty one thousand. So who knows?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:06:14] Yeah, yeah. You couldn't have planned that Odie VIDEO You know, it was too perfect. You can't plan something like that now, so no panic thing. Yeah, my husband does selfie tapes all the time, and our dog, there are slates where she's at his feet and you're like, Well,

Wesley Ryan [00:06:28] that's all you're getting.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:06:29] It's a self tape at home. I don't know what you want.

Wesley Ryan [00:06:31] I already wasted most of my day trying to get these scenes down. I'm not going to waste any more time on this. Honestly, you're going to get what you get

Gillian Pensavalle [00:06:38] And you don't care anyway, Maloney or whoever's casting it. Chris Maloney does not cast us.

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Wesley Ryan [00:06:42] No, he does not.

Wesley Ryan [00:06:43] But I would love if he had a say. Wouldn't that be nice? But please, he's also so hot. Can I say that? I can say that

Gillian Pensavalle [00:06:50] you could say anything you want, Chris. Chris Maloney has a. He's got away, right?

Wesley Ryan [00:06:55] Let's daddy vibes for sure.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:06:56] He appeals to a lot of people.

Wesley Ryan [00:06:58] Yeah, many a demographic.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:07:00] So tell me I ask everyone this. Tell me your life story. I know you're from L.A.. Tell me everything about you, OK?

Wesley Ryan [00:07:06] The Spark notes version.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:07:07] No, no,

Gillian Pensavalle [00:07:09] I want the full stop version.

Wesley Ryan [00:07:12] I was born by a river and a little tent. No, I was born in L.A. Santa Monica specifically, and I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. I grew up doing musical theater. A family friend owned her own new theater company that I grew up doing. So I did my first youth theater production when I was about. Eight years old. And it was always something that I was just kind of good at that I had fun doing. I didn't expect it to be the career path that I chose. My mom still says to this day that she's shocked that I did this for a living because I was such a shy child. If you needed me to do something in front of other people and you asked me to do it, it was now like all of a sudden, nerves are bad. But what we would do three shows a year with with this youth theater company and without fail before every show, I would get sick because my biggest fear was not being able to perform to my standards. And then I would make sure that that happened by getting sick before the show. And I was like, See, I can't do this. I actually wanted to be a surgeon. I picked the

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high school that I went to in Southern California because it was a private Catholic high school, but they have the highest graduation percentage to four year medical university. So most of my graduating class are doctors of some kind. And my sophomore year of high school I booked my father actually passed away in September of that year. And the month after that, I booked my first professional gig at 15 called 13, which is a Jason Robert Brown musical that ended up going to Broadway. Ariana Grande, the whole nine yards.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:08:46] the whole nine.

Wesley Ryan [00:08:47] So I did that at 15 and in L.A. and kind of it changed my whole trajectory. I realized that, you know, this is not only something that I am passionate, passionate about doing. It's something that is. Can it can be a substantial career, and I mean, it making fifteen hundred a week at 15 years old is shocking, you know? But yeah, like I said, I'd change my whole trajectory. Actually left school my sophomore year because we had to be tutored like on set and the whole like childhood actor thing. I came to fruition and I honestly couldn't have come at a better time because, like I said, my dad had just passed away and it kind of gave me. I distracted and something to pour that energy into instead of focusing, I really think that it saved my life, to be honest. Sure. But yeah, after that, I kind of threw the surgeon idea away. I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do. I didn't necessarily want to go to school for theater, but I don't know. I'm 17 and don't know what's going on, so I was like, OK, well, I'll just go to community college for a couple of years. Be a dance major. And my second year of school, a spring semester of my sophomore year of college, I auditioned for a theater company in southern Utah out of an outdoor amphitheater called To Account Amphitheater. And at this audition I had, my audition was Friday and a callback Saturday at my callback. The choreographer of the show was like, he pulls me aside and he's like, Hey, I own my own dance company in Utah. I had a dancer that had to go home to Puerto Rico to be with his mom, who's ill. I need a replacement. Are you interested? And I was like, I'm sorry, what? He was like, I know this is all crazy. Like, I can give you all the details like whatever you need. He's like, The thing is, we start rehearsals on Monday, so you have to drive to Utah tomorrow. And the fact that we moved to Utah to join the dance company, he was like, I will. I can call you tonight

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and talk to your parents to make sure that they know that I'm not some serial killer that's going to Dateline me. I was going to say thank you.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:10:53] That didn't have you end up on Dateline.

Wesley Ryan [00:10:55] I was like a little red flagy. He's the choreographer. It's like, This is normal, right? Like, these things happen. Oh my God. So I get home. He calls my mom that night and my best friend. I packed in my car and I moved to Utah the next day and I joined this dance company in Salt Lake

Gillian Pensavalle [00:11:09] and lived to tell about

Wesley Ryan [00:11:11] At the dance theater. Yeah, and lived to tell about it. I ended up booking the summer contract out to economy, the Little Mermaid and Grease there, the first regional The Little Mermaid. Yeah. And then that was 20 11, 2011 2012. I started working for Disney. I did a newsie show brand new show there that they were opening. In the spring of 2013. I moved to Hong Kong for the first time to do The Lion King Show at Hong Kong Disneyland out there. Holy shit, what's Hong Kong like? Oh my gosh. It's one of my favorite cities on the planet. I didn't know what to expect when I went in. I was very scared. I know this sounds like wow, he just goes and has no fear and look at all. This is like, no, I trembled. I called friends crying, being like, What am I? What? What am I going to have a cell phone? Like, I was already picturing and this is my Lac ignorant brain picturing being like in a rice paddy in the middle of nowhere. Like, couldn't be further from the truth. Hong Kong is like there's a beautiful metropolitan city, right? And it's like such a melting pot of different worlds of people because it was an old trade port back in the day for the British. And so you've got people from literally every country that live there doing all sorts of things in it. It's like this weird Hong Kong is a bunch of islands connected by bridges. So you have land, city, mountains and sea like all in this like tiny little country. That's like same population as New York City and like a fraction of the size and say it's crazy.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:12:38] Can I ask you something from Can we rewind for a second? Go for it. What changed from you feeling almost

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if I may like self-sabotaging, like feeling so nervous and then getting sick and then not being able to and the nerves and being so shy? And now you're just like, Hell, yeah, I'll go to Utah. Hell, yeah, I'll do this. Like, what did can you? Was it 13? Like what shifted for you?

Wesley Ryan [00:13:00] Um, I think it was just the idea that the things that I wanted were actually possible. Like, Yes, this thing kind of came at me from left field, which was moving to Utah, but like I was going to school as a dance major. Like, why not go? Like, Why am I taking this math class for my dance major when I can go be a dance major and a dance company like it? Just it seemed like all the things that I wanted. Despite how scary they were, it was more of just like, put that fear aside and run with it because this opportunity, like does not happen to everybody. You know, things do not just happen like that. So there's a reason for it. I'm a firm believer. I don't really believe in coincidence. I believe that everything happens for a reason, whether it is, you know, a life lesson, whether it is to boost your career, whatever it is. One reoccurring theme in my life is is last minute changes. And so I think when that happens, I don't have time to overthink it either. I'm moving to Utah tomorrow or I'm not. I don't have time to sit there and be like, Oh, what is this going to mean if I don't know, either got a go or you don't? I always say, like, I live in New York City now when I'm not on tour and I always say, Hesitate when you die. If you're crossing the street and you think, Oh, should I go now you've been hit by a car and you're dead. If you just go, you dodged the traffic. It's like frogger.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:14:18] Exactly right.

Wesley Ryan [00:14:19] And so I feel like that's at some point I adopted that mentality of hesitate and you die and stopped doing. I did my best to stop hesitating and just embracing. The things that came my way, and I'm thankful to say that it's paying off.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:14:33] Yeah, that's hard, though, know for sure.

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Wesley Ryan [00:14:36] It's definitely I mean, it's not even something that I don't think you ever master it. You just either continue to put one foot in front of the other and do it, or you don't.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:14:49] OK, so tell me sorry, you were in Hong Kong. And then what happened after a move to Hong Kong?

Wesley Ryan [00:14:53] For my first year, I was actually I only do a six month contract as Simba in The Lion King out there. And I love by the time my contract was coming to an end, I wasn't ready to leave. I think I just gotten settled in Hong Kong and I figured out the city and was like enjoying my twenty one year old life, like living abroad in a foreign country and like making more money than I ever had. So I was like, OK, I think I'm going to stay on for another six did another six months. Loved up came home the day after I landed, coming back from Hong Kong and an audition for a cruise contract as a singer dancer and my audition in the room, the head of casting was like. I have a ship that's going out at the end of the summer that you'd be perfect for. You have a job if you want to. And I was like, What? Oh, OK, OK, OK. Hesitating, you die. Let's go. So I then knew that I had like after a year of living abroad and being away from my family and all my closest friends in L.A., I got to live in L.A. and do some traveling for that summer and then went right into my first and only cruise contract on Holland America cruise line. We did the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. And being on a cruise ship, being a performer on a ship is such a strange world because you only work like the amount it was like. We had four production shows that we did and we would alternate them over two weeks. So you did two one week into the next week, but that's the only days that you work. So then every other day you just like get off in port and these foreign countries and they live your best life in France for the day and they get on the next day, you have a show, then you're in Greece for a day and you go to Greece and then you get back out and then have a couple of days to sail back. And it was honestly, I loved it. It's not for everybody. I don't know that I would go back to do it again now in my life and career. But at 22 years old, I feel like it was the perfect, perfect gig for me. I knew that one of the things that I wanted to do, I actually put off moving to New York for about a decade because I wanted. I knew once I moved to New York that was going to be home and I was going to be there. So I was like, OK, any opportunity that I can

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have to work elsewhere, to work abroad, to have jobs that take me abroad, to get paid, to live somewhere else is like definitely my M.O. at the time. And I mean, you had to get paid to travel and to do what I love while doing it, it's just it was a the best of of all the world.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:17:20] Yeah, and it's like, it's not just traveling, it's traveling. Yeah, you're seeing the country, you're seeing the world. I mean, that's amazing. And I just want to make it clear to the listeners and I'm saying this in a good way. You didn't study. You didn't go to like a performing arts high school and then straight into a performing arts college and get a degree. And I'm saying that because I want the listeners to know that you don't have to be painted into that corner.

Wesley Ryan [00:17:45] Absolutely. I get asked all the time, Where do you go to school? And I'm like, I didn't. I actually dropped out of school and nobody cares.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:17:50] And nobody cares about your job like your talent, you know?

Wesley Ryan [00:17:52] Right, right. That's how I mean, it took me a long time to be able to, like, even say this because I my biggest fear was I was coming off as cocky. And so I feel like I downplayed myself a lot as to not come out. There's a fine line between confidence and cockiness, and not everybody like straddles that line very well. And so I would do the exact opposite, which is like, be detrimental to myself or, like you said, earlier self-sabotage and and other stuff. But yeah, not not going to school is also an option. You know, like it doesn't have to be, especially because, like, I couldn't have afforded it some of these universities for musical theater.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:18:28] Oh yeah.

Wesley Ryan [00:18:29] Tens of thousands of dollars a year that I didn't have, you know, like I was just I also feel like a lot of my career has been right place at the right time and not just in terms of like the lack of it all, but just like where my mindset was, where my alignment was and what I wanted and and being ready for the

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opportunities that came my way as they happened. A friend of mine a couple of years ago, her name is Daisy. She's a phenomenal, phenomenal performer and human. But she had posted online and was like, I looked up the definition of of of how I was now not waiting. It's not just waiting for opportunities to come to you, it's waiting in readiness for those opportunities because if an opportunity comes your way and you're not ready for it, it's not going to benefit you the way that it needs to or could. But if you're sitting there knowing and all all of you what you are that like this dance company in Utah, I'm ready for that, whether I think I am or not, like I have done the work I have stretched. I have been whatever I've been doing that when that opportunity arises, I'm not rising to the occasion. I'm at the occasion, you know, I'm everything lined up. That's been a huge theme throughout my adult life and career is just things coming to me when I was ready for them so that they could be as beneficial to whatever as as as they could be, which is a blessing for sure. I have struggled with my entire life with insecurities of multiple factors. You know, being mixed race, being queer, being whatever it was, being too tall, being too short, I didn't. I'm six feet tall now. I graduated high school like five eight. No one thought that I was going to be. This time I went into high school like five foot. It's just interesting that made things happen the way they have. But yeah, I think it took me a long time to. Embrace all that I am and things that are. I grew up in a very religious household. I, you know, had I hated my queerness for a very long time because of that upbringing. I hid from that queerness for a long time. I spent a lot of my life feeling like I was hiding. And I, I think, moving to a new state, moving to a new country at a moment's notice. I could be whoever I wanted. I could let go of some of those learned traumas and just kind of exist in the worlds that I'm currently in, which aided in that confidence at Burr said that, you know, the reassurance of being where I'm supposed to be, what I'm supposed to be there. You know, in this industry, especially, it's really easy to compare careers, it's really easy to compare resumes, it's really easy to compare where I at, where somebody else is, when in reality like. One thing that really helped me was in moments where my imposter syndrome, which I still struggle with, like pops up and I can go, Wow, I don't feel talent talented enough to be here in Hamilton. I can look around a room of people that I think are so incredibly talented. And that is, by default, proof of something that I'm doing that I deserve to be in this room with these

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people that I look at and like. That's kind of how I combat a lot of that. And those ones are like, Oh gosh, look, I'm not the best dancer I could be. It's like, I'm in Hamilton. Like, I have to remember that I am in Hamilton that I've done. I have had this career that I've had because of the things that I've brought forward. And again. Sure, some of it's been right place, right time, but I had to rise on occasion and be ready for that, and that is a testament to me and not cockiness. Burr confidence. I deserve to be here, you know?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:22:08] Yeah, it's not like when you were getting those opportunities, they were picking your name out of a hat. I mean, they asked you specifically because they saw what you can do

Wesley Ryan [00:22:16] whether or not I believe that, you know,

Gillian Pensavalle [00:22:18] sure, that right. And also part of it is that they saw what you can do. They're like, Yeah, let's let's be on a cruise ship with with this person for a little bit because you're just like, you're prepared, you're good at it and you're nice to be around.

Wesley Ryan [00:22:31] That said, I think to being nice gets you, that gets you a lot further than people give it credit for the socially in an industry like this that can be so cutthroat, like genuine kindness does not go unnoticed

Gillian Pensavalle [00:22:44] to everyone, to the lighting people, to the, you know, to everybody.

Wesley Ryan [00:22:49] I literally think our props people when I hand them a chair like, thank you for taking this chair for me and not because I feel like I have to. But like, we're all here, a lot of our locals in each city, they're learning the show for the first time. They're probably more stressed out. I mean, there is something I am. I've done this one hundred and fifty times now, but you know, you, you, you get and not necessarily in my cast, but is in this industry. You get people that are like, Oh my gosh, they were in the wrong spot. It's like, I give everybody a break now. You only get a couple bucks and you keep doing the thing that's wrong. I I have to say something very nice thing with a smile. But yeah, I just feel like kindness goes a lot further than a lot of people give it credit for. And I try to be

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as kind to everybody that I interact with so much because we never know what anybody is dealing with. Anyone's anyone's day could be. I mean, I've had days where I'm not on in my best mental emotional mindset and heaven forbid, somebody. Judge, my entire character off that one day when I wasn't me, you know, even though that's the social interaction they had with me, like, I try to put the best foot forward in that regard. I'm 11 out of 10 times, if I can.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:24:01] Yeah, yeah. OK, so that what? So tell me.

Wesley Ryan [00:24:05] So I worked on my cruise contract. I got home. I took a year off of working and traveled the world with money that I had saved. I did. You can do what's called friend on board cruising, where like if you know somebody who works on a ship, usually so they treat dancers like absolute garbage on cruise ships. They have to like share rooms and they're in bunk beds on every ship. But in a lot of them, there's the vocalists will get their own cabins on. I know it's horrible. So I have my own cabin and so you can do what's called friend on board, where you could come cruise with me for free and like, stay in my room. So you get like you get like crew privileges. You can like go to the crew bar with me and all this stuff and like being in crew areas. But you also passenger status because you're a friend on board and you get to go to all the restaurants and bars. OK, so the after I got back from a cruise contract, I front on boarded with three other friends of mine that were on my contract, who did another contract together and we did a month. I was on board for 30 days and we went to the lost city of Petra. We went all over like just like places that I never even dreamed of seeing. Like, we got to see where, like Moses sacrificed an animal. Like it was like you could see his brother, Aaron's like burial site from like a mile away on this other mountain. They were just like crazy biblical things that I only ever heard about, like I'm seeing in person. It was like nuts. So I did a year of traveling blew through all my money, which is like the best way to do it. Actually, if you're going to pour it into something, pour it into that

Gillian Pensavalle [00:25:43] what's going to say, Oh my

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Wesley Ryan [00:25:44] God, yes. And when I was at my wit's end of like, OK, what am I going to do next? I was fully ready to get a Starbucks job like anything to just be able to pay these bills. And I got an opportunity to go back to Hong Kong. So I went back to Hong Kong for another year just to stock up some coin and do what I was going to do. I came home for six months and then moved back to Hong Kong for the last time, which is now in 2018

Gillian Pensavalle [00:26:08] Was home New York at the time.

Wesley Ryan [00:26:09] No homosexuals in California got it. And yeah, I was dating somebody in who was still living in Asia. He was doing Cirque du Soleil type show in Macao. And if you hear this, you're an asshole. That's right. Yeah, and just not a nice man. He was not a nice man.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:26:30] Fuck that guy.

Wesley Ryan [00:26:31] I spent probably three years too long and our three year relationship. So, but yeah, it was. It was

Gillian Pensavalle [00:26:39] them. Not to you.

Wesley Ryan [00:26:39] Yeah, I was I to learn. I do learn. But yes, I moved back after six months for the last six months, just like kind of like repair things because long distance is hard enough when you're living, when it's by continental and a 15 hour time difference like it's next to impossible. So I'm back out there for the last six months, winter breaking up on that contract thankfully didn't feel so good at the time, but wasn't a blessing in disguise. Totally. And then moved back to the states with every intention of finally moving to New York. People have been telling me since I was 18 like, Oh my gosh, I need to move to New York and move New York. But I just didn't feel like I was ready for that commitment. Like I said earlier, like I wanted, I knew that I wanted to travel, and moving to New York meant making New York home, and I wasn't quite ready for that. I also think I was a little bit of an excuse just because I was scared and not feeling ready because what I've ever what if everybody was wrong? What if I went to New York and I didn't book something and I just became this like floundered, washed up actor in New York? And then I've let

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everybody down has ever told me that I would do this thing. It was too much pressure wasn't going to do it right. So finally, at the end of, well, beginning of 2019, I moved to New York and it was the best decision that I ever made. I kind of went in with the mindset that I was going to do something different this time. I wasn't just going to wait for auditions to come to me. I was going to be in every audition room that I could be in. I was auditioning five to eight times a week for anything that I could audition for. A Broadway regional productions tour is like anything that I could because I mean, I feel like my biggest fear in auditioning, especially living in L.A. and doing theater. There isn't much. There aren't constant auditions. They come and go so fleeting for that specifically that I never felt ready for each audition because I always felt like I was scrambling because, oh no, now it's here and I have to like, do this thing. But when you're in New York and you're auditioning this often, it becomes like, I like to say, that's your job. Auditioning is our job as actors, though the payoff, the reward is the show like, then you do the other work which is getting paid to do what you love, but like your actual job, is to impress the people in the. And audition and. And I went fully went in with that mindset, and within my first three months, I didn't know it at the time. But within my first three months of living in New York, I booked every job that I needed to to like, sustain me for the year by the end of January. I booked West Side Story in Chicago at the Lyric Opera, which was one of the, if not the largest scale production of West Side Story to ever be done. We had a thirty seven piece orchestra, the largest employer with like extra like they were writing in lines for instruments that were not written in there because we just had the or the Opera Orchestra to work with. And it was the largest venue it's been done in. The stage was massive. We had. So at the lyric they do, they have there are like rap, but like there, there are other vocalists that are there throughout the entire season and I do one musical every year. And so I think they do something like two two of the operas and one of the musicals like each person will get either three operas or like two operas in a musical and they like rotate all the people through further like adult ensemble of of the of these operas and shows. So we had like teachers, we had extra police officers like the dance in the gym scene, like we had like counselors were like walking around like telling people to not be dancing so close together. Like we just had more people than we were than West Side stories ever been done. But then it was like a

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beautiful production. I have like, I made lifelong friends. Do you know what's so cool about that?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:30:12] That really would feel like the city? Yeah, for sure. There are definitely other people on the street. It really felt,

Wesley Ryan [00:30:19] well, it's not just the kids, you know, the like, which like,

Gillian Pensavalle [00:30:23] I'm just thinking of like, if you watch the movie, there's like no one on the street. There's never like anyone else in the basketball court now.

Wesley Ryan [00:30:29] It's just them

Gillian Pensavalle [00:30:30] them. Yeah. So funny.

Wesley Ryan [00:30:32] But yeah, so we did that and had a great. I loved that contract, honestly, and living in Chicago was a treat. We had the best time. In February, I had another audition and I booked in the Heights and Sacramento Music Circus, but that was until the end of summer. So I knew that I had hosted West Side, which ended in May and August. So just like, enjoy being in the city, it was World Pride in New York that year. So just like this big, it was just like the best summer to live in New York. I went to Sacramento and did In The Heights, which is a dream show of mine, and since I saw it for the first time in 2009, I was like, I have to be in the show. I was in the ensemble, but it was the first time that In The Heights had been done in the rounds. Because Sacramento Bee is a circus, there are theaters in the round there, so they like rig these two fire escape. So they actually used for a West Side story when they were there before on the stage that we could like climb up and down like use like you get. Most of my agencies were from like back of house climbing up into the rafters to come down the fire escape like they just they utilize the space.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:31:38] So you see these chills from that scene,

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Wesley Ryan [00:31:42] just hair standing on end. It was honestly another phenomenal experience, and they took such great care of us out there. That probably means Lac circus. It was like a highlight of my career. I got back to New York and also that contract is crazy. It's three weeks long if a week of rehearsals and no a week and a half of rehearsals and a week of shows. And that's all you do. Oh my God. Yeah. And while you're doing your shows, the show that's after you is in rehearsals so that you close, they load you and you have like four days of and then you do the show for a week. And like Larry, it's like zips zap zop. You're out of there.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:32:18] Here's your hat. What's your hurry? Right, right.

Wesley Ryan [00:32:21] So I get back to New York in September and I'm like, OK, like, that's all she booked. So what are what are we doing now? I was like a friend of mine, recommended a catering company, so I got involved with them. I worked with them for a grand total of two weeks before I got the call that I that I booked the national tour of Hamilton, which I auditioned for in March of 2019. So six months later, I get a call without going back in for them that I am joining the national tour of Hamilton.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:32:52] OK, first of all, your life is fascinating. This is I can't you?

Wesley Ryan [00:32:56] I'm know that sounds fascinating because it feels hectic living it.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:33:00] I want to trade places for like a week. Who knows where I'll be? We have places I'm off to Japan and then Australia like, it's a

Wesley Ryan [00:33:06] mystery, right?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:33:08] OK, so wait, did you have representation when you were in New York or were you just like submitting for auditions?

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Wesley Ryan [00:33:13] So I was submitting it first on my own. A friend of mine who saw audition season in New York as January, February, March, typically for theater, for theater auditions and auditions go year round also, but for a lot of like summer regional gigs or summer stocks, they auditioned in the first three months of the year that they know who their cast is for the summer. So another friend of mine moved us around the time that I did, and so him and I were like auditioning constantly. We lived like a block from each other. It was great. We knew each other from working at Disney. He's a big dude. Sensation, and he's a great guy, kind, talented, smart, it's great, he's annoying in the best way

Gillian Pensavalle [00:33:52] Right? If you didn't love him, you'd hate him. Right, right, right, right.

Wesley Ryan [00:33:57] And he was I was just talking to I was like, You know, I'm happy to be in these audition rooms. I myself like being online. Like, the nice thing about being an actors equity is our union. The nice thing about being a union members that you can get online and they have a portal of all the auditions for that weeks. You can see them all along there. But it also is nice to like, bypass like open call round and just like get to the appointments. So he was like, I mean, my agents here in New York, like, I can send your stuff over to him. This isn't like this is at the end of January. And I was like, OK, like, I mean, hey, I'll take any help, but I can get at this point. Got in contact with his agent Dave at Daniel Hoff Agency, and Dave and I hit it off and he was like, Listen, I love you real. I want to work with you. I think you might go far in this industry like, let's do this. I was like, OK, before I even like, officially signed with them. He, like, had me in the room for like the Aladdin principle cover for Broadway. And I was like, OK, so he's he's working, right? So I signed with him in February and kind of just, you know, went on with that and still with him. He's great. He sends me out on all sorts of things. If I don't like something, I tell him, I don't like it. He's like, That's fair. We don't go for it. Like, very communicative, which is is great.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:35:15] I think that's really valuable that he says that because in the acting world, which I used to be in a little bit, there's this feeling of like, who? I can't say no to these

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things. You feel like you have to say yes to everything. And that's not true

Wesley Ryan [00:35:29] Absolutely. I mean, especially like pre-pandemic, we'll get into that. But I'm like, there's so many times in this industry where you know, you book a job and you're like, Wow, I'm so lucky that they chose me. And so you're willing to bend over backwards and do things like, for example, when I got the call that I had books, the national tour, it was a Thursday and they were like, OK, we need you here by Tuesday. So I like, quit my job, you know, found a sublet for my apartment. It was like doing all these things. They call me the next day and they're like, Actually, can we push it back a month? And I'm like,

Gillian Pensavalle [00:36:03] Oh my God, we have to do this better. I'm sorry.

Wesley Ryan [00:36:07] It's right, right? I'm like, I'm like, I just quit. My job was like, OK, so I called my job back. I was like, Hey, I'm actually here for another month. Like, can I still work some shifts in there? And they were like, Yeah, no problem. Which thankfully. But yeah, so it's just like sickness like that. But you know, there's so many things that I. Was willing to put up with in this industry, because that's just how it was. Before we do that, I got and I joined the company of Hamilton, the Angelica tour at the end of October. I had five weeks of rehearsal that was very stressful and my hair fell out.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:36:44] Is that right? Really?

Wesley Ryan [00:36:45] Yeah. Like about I sent a video to my mom and like November of like, literally you could see my scalp through my hair. It was like weeping in this video. It was just, oh, it was just so stressful. I like. It's a beast. I mean, it's a three hour long show, and the ensemble does not leave the stage, and our dance captains are also swings on the show, so they're getting pulled into the show at a moment's notice. So I had two days of rehearsal a week for three hours a day, and I learned all the way up to help less satisfied, which is like the midpoint of Act one in like three rehearsals. Like I was just like every day that I came in, I get like

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an hour. Dance captains are incredible. They they I thank them for getting us up and running into the show the way that they do, because it is. It is a beast to learn. It is an even bigger beast to try to teach. Yes. Well, like I was rehearsing alone, like the cast was already, even though people were coming and going like the cast, as is when I got there, was pretty set in stone and I was rehearsing offsite, so I never really saw anybody. It was like very alienating item. I had moments of, you know, contemplating if this is what I wanted to do, if this is how this is, how I'm going to feel doing this, I don't know. And not even Hamilton related, just in general. Is this something that I want to continue to feel because this does not feel good made it through the rehearsal process with half the head of hair. And I debuted in Richmond, Virginia, on December 5th of 2019 and hit the ground running. I mean, really, by the time I got to like being on stage, like welcomed into the cast, like finally around people and like feeling like part of it all. And right when I started to feel comfortable the pandemic at.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:38:36] Well, when you are feeling that way, alienated and sort of alone and learning this behemoth, were you able to communicate that to anybody around you,

Wesley Ryan [00:38:45] not around me again? Really, the only people that I had much interaction with on a day to day basis on tour were our dance captains. I was living in an Airbnb by myself. So after rehearsals, I would come home and I would be alone. I'd wake up and I would be alone, and I'd go into work at rehearsal time and I wouldn't see anybody from the cast because I was rehearsing. I'd say it was just like this vicious cycle of like feeling that loneliness. Towards the end of my rehearsal process, probably like week four, I was talking to our dance captain, our male dance captain, Desmond Nunn. He is an incredible performer, an incredible man. I think him to this day. And Lisa Feingold, who's our our female dance captain for getting me into this show, like I really attribute it to them. But I was crying and I was like, I don't feel like I am delivering to you a product that I want to be. I don't feel like I'm living up to my own standards, much less standards that like you have. And he looked at me and he was like, Wesley, you are doing everything above and beyond that we could be asking you to do like, you have to know that we are so close to being done. You can see the finish line. I know it feels

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hectic, but like you are where you're supposed to be and you are fully capable of doing this, even if you don't feel like it. And of course, then I'm like hyperventilating, crying and there's rehearsal sue I got. I needed to hear that

Gillian Pensavalle [00:40:07] And like, when you're upset and someone says something nice to you, it's oh,

Wesley Ryan [00:40:11] it's over just over. You take a 15 minute break because I was like, OK, I'm going to go get some water and like, have a snack, right?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:40:18] Like, the worst thing he could have said was something nice.

Wesley Ryan [00:40:20] Exactly. I'd rather have like a firm that I was doing a horrible job. And next, actually,

Gillian Pensavalle [00:40:24] I knew it would just be like, No, it's fine. It's fine. But for him to say like nice things and just tell that imposter syndrome to go away for a minute.

Wesley Ryan [00:40:31] Yeah, yeah. And it was nice, like he said, that he was having when he so he is an original company member to the Angelica tour, he's been on it since the get go. He wasn't always the dance captain. He became the dance captain in like March of twenty eighteen twenty eighteen, twenty nineteen one that year.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:40:46] Anyone who cares.

Wesley Ryan [00:40:49] Exactly. But he said that he was having similar issues when he was on a tour. I mean, being a swing in the show to learn six male ensemble tracks and to be ready to throw them on at the drop of a hat, sometimes the middle of a show. I've gotten injured during Yorktown and literally had to have somebody beyond by non stop and finish the show for me, like the hour swings and our understudies and our like standbys and covers our superheroes. And I'm glad to like in the conversations that are going on in the industry right now. We're finally acknowledging that because they are the reason why the

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show goes on. The show must go on. Mentality has literally only they're able to be done because of our swinging standbys.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:41:26] Right? So let's treat them better. You know, like maybe the head of the Broadway League cannot be such an asshole

Wesley Ryan [00:41:30] and blame them for why shows are going down. I'm like, They're the reason that the show was on. Like Mike, what? Especially doing something like COVID when it wipes 15 of us out in one go right?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:41:41] And everyone's like doing their best and to say whatever we I. I've discussed her at length. Yeah, I think it was a really. It's beyond ignorant. Ignorant is.

Wesley Ryan [00:41:52] It also just

Wesley Ryan [00:41:53] goes to show that she has no idea what this industry takes, which means that she should not be in the position that she

Gillian Pensavalle [00:41:58] should not have as the head of the Broadway League. And then her non-apology apology was like I was. I wasn't aware, right? Don't joke

Wesley Ryan [00:42:06] that actually, you just dug that grave deeper

Gillian Pensavalle [00:42:08] of funny that you don't actually know what these people do. Right, right? Felt like she should be for I don't know.

Wesley Ryan [00:42:14] You're the

Wesley Ryan [00:42:14] one person who should

Gillian Pensavalle [00:42:15] know and having their back and supporting them and the voice to support these people who have been treated. Not great. I'm I'm sorry. Like, yeah, the industry needs to

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do better in a lot of ways, but also the way like this whole, that's just part of the gig. No, just because,

Wesley Ryan [00:42:33] no, not anymore

Gillian Pensavalle [00:42:33] It's been part of the gig doesn't mean that it's OK. Or does it mean that it needs to continue

Wesley Ryan [00:42:37] to be right? And I think, you know, we need to throw out the show must go on mentality. There are reasons like why the show should not go on. Yes. Oh my gosh, we have this instance. And what city were in Fort Worth? We had to cancel the show because it snowed in Texas and you know how Texas is with their winter nonexistence. The venue put out a post that blamed the cast for not coming into work as to why the show was canceled instead of the venue taking responsibility, as did everything else in the area, and shut everything in the area announced three days prior that they would be closed on that day because of the snow. And then then you decided to stay open and keep saying the show was going on as planned. The show is going on as planned and then the day comes and they have to cancel it. And they were like the the Angelica company could not get enough cast members together to do the show, so the show's going down to knock that. What's the evidence based performance?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:43:32] Oh, that's

Gillian Pensavalle [00:43:32] bullshit. I'm positive Ted Cruz is behind it somehow.

Wesley Ryan [00:43:35] But somehow, you know, he had a hand in there, but he'd suck. So the venue ended up taking the post down. Good. OK, good. I mean, we had company members arguing with patrons in the comments because the comments were like, I can't believe the castle do this. How selfish. What about those of us who drove three hours to be here? I was like, We didn't make the show go down. I couldn't get to work. We had a weird cast like my classmates had their cars frozen to their driveways like we could not get to work. It is not that we didn't want to come into work, so for it to be phrased that way was just it just goes to show that like it's going to be taken out on who

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they want to be, to be taken out on and like, there's people that are not standing for it anymore, which is nice.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:44:14] They took the post down to they apologized in any way. No, they just took it down.

Wesley Ryan [00:44:18] Absolutely not. They just took it down. And it was like the post they went back up was the same photo, but a different caption that said the shows to the rest of the weekend will be going on as planned. Nothing else about Thursday. No apology. No nothing, just the rest of the shows will go on as planned, and it was like one of those ones that were like, Wow. I mean, the majority of our cast, like shared the posts to our stories and were like, Tag them this at all. Unacceptable. We this is not this is inaccurate information. Don't blame us for a weather issue that you should have canceled that you knew about weeks prior.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:44:51] That is just like there are so many choices that could have been made, and they chose that one. You did. You could have just said, we are close today. Period.

Wesley Ryan [00:45:00] They shouldn't have waited till day of to do it. Like I said, everything else in the area closed down or announced they would be closed on that Thursday days prior. I agree. They should have just done that, but instead they were, you know, trying to make as much corn as they could, which fair venues have not been open. The thing about our tour is that, like we are and most things right now were the first show to be in a lot of these venues since the pandemic. So like, I know they're trying to recoup. However, you wouldn't have lost as much money if he had announced the prior two because you probably could have found ways to trick people into other shows and disperse them. And then you everywhere. Everyone's good to go. But they didn't do that, so it is what it is.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:45:37] As my friend Damian would say, see what the problem is. You're using logic and yeah,

Wesley Ryan [00:45:42] and that are incapable of its own, it

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Gillian Pensavalle [00:45:45] seems. Wait, so let me ask you, what was your first experience with Hamilton? Were you listening to it? Were your friends telling you

Wesley Ryan [00:45:52] so when it came, I was living in Hong Kong the second time when everything blew up around Hamilton, so I was overseas. I had heard the music. I didn't know what to expect. Show wise, I was like, Hey, I'm like, Listen, a white story told with black and brown people are my Siamese. Fuck up, like, here we go. You know, I didn't actually get to see the show until December of 2018. I had gone to New York for a last minute Beetlejuice audition. Think I'd better just coming back, by the way?

Gillian Pensavalle [00:46:25] Thank God, right? Yes.

Wesley Ryan [00:46:26] One of my best friends was in the original cast. She's not coming back, so she's trying to have a baby. Oh, lovely, Kim.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:46:31] Yeah, great all across the board.

Wesley Ryan [00:46:32] But yeah, definitely, definitely. We love that she's making decisions that she needs to. But I was very sad to see that show go down. But in 2018 I was in New York and I got to see the show for the first time. One of my. Long time Friends is a swing in the Broadway company, Robert Kennedy. Oh yeah. Yeah. And he was on a random day, and I think texting was like, What are the chances that you're on tonight? He's like, Actually, I am. Do you want a standing room ticket? And I was like, Yeah, standing room. So I ran in there and was like, Oh shit, like, OK, OK, OK. And I think I taking a picture that night and put it on my Instagram Story that was like one day, one day I will be in the shower. I don't know when. I don't know how long that's going to take. I stopped giving myself timelines for things. You know, it needs to happen in this period or whatever, but. It was crazy because almost a year to the date of seeing the show, it was like the next day I debuted in Hamilton and it was one of those moments of like, Thank God for time hop where you can like, look back and see all the things you posted because that was on there. And I was like, Wow. Like, little did I know that a year later, I would be standing on the stage. So like, I had just seen it for the first time.

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It was it was one of those full circle moments that I just reveled in because I just blessings galore.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:47:53] Yeah. So you were listening to it, loved it, wanted to see it. And then what was your experience? I love Standing Room.

Wesley Ryan [00:47:58] So yeah, oh my gosh, me too. I was like, Nah, like, just like getting to see it all. It like exceeded. It wasn't what I expected. I think I am not in a bad way in musical theater these days. You hear a song and I think about the way that I would dance to that music and mixing choreography to like not not even a different take, just like if it was less as much as it is going on, it was less full than I thought it was going to be like. I thought it was going to be like every bit as filled with every single thing. I'm like those sections of that. Well, like, it really is the storytelling of all the movement that is so much more important than like dancing the choreography. And he says, like, if you feel good dancing my choreography, you're doing it wrong like it shouldn't. You should never feel like I'm grooving in this. Like, it's like everything should be. John, with the intent with which it is taught, which is another beautiful reason why I love the show, like you have things like in a room where it happens, we're like the reason why our arms go out. You're like looking over your fingertips because you're looking down the hallway to where you want to be. You want to be in that room down there like learning that, like watching it. You're just like, Oh, look at how pretty that is. Like, Oh, yeah, yeah, baba. And then you learn and you're like, Whoa, like, there is nothing that is not thought out in this choreography and in this like movement in this blocking in this. We got a and I actually came in to our rehearsal process when we got back post-pandemic in August of this year, and he was saying something that I didn't even notice. And the transitions between scenes or between, like if you are in like my shop when we're leaving the tavern, there will always be someone that walks from stage left and stage right, and that's the page turning. And like, I was like,

Gillian Pensavalle [00:49:41] Why know what Andy I've had?

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Wesley Ryan [00:49:43] I had it. He's just, he's such a smart man. I have to tell this story also about Andy Blankenbuehler. Oh my god. I auditioned for In The Heights in two thousand ten. For the first time. He got called back for Sonny. I go by Wesley Ryan. That's my stage name. I like governor. My name is Ryan Wesley Ogburn, an Auburn fanatic. Oge, you are M Burns an English word, but I'll get in front of it and it's pretty self-explanatory, but it gets mispronounced all the time. I get Ogden. I get Osborne. Anything you can think of. So I'm A. Audition. And I told him this. And when he was visiting us for rehearsals early, early last year, I was like, You know, I changed my name because he's like, What do you mean? I was like, I was auditioning for In The Heights, and you called my name to call me back and you called me Ryan Oglethorpe. And I raised my hand was like Ogburn, and he goes, Oh yeah, that

Gillian Pensavalle [00:50:40] There's not a single site, there's

Wesley Ryan [00:50:42] not a cage anywhere

Gillian Pensavalle [00:50:43] on this andy, please

Wesley Ryan [00:50:45] And so I was like, OK, so we're going to drop Ogburn. And I didn't like Ryan Wesley, so I switched and went by Wesley Ryan. And I have ever since I was like, I have to thank you for that because I feel like that new person as I've gotten me through this industry. But it's just I'm almost like his name is blankenbuehler.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:51:01] And I know, I know. Oh,.

Wesley Ryan [00:51:04] Oglethorpe, oh god, this is me.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:51:06] Fucking hilarious is so good.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:51:09] Oh my God

Wesley Ryan [00:51:11] He just saw letters and went with that. I like love it. But also, like, wouldn't have changed it for the world because literally, I think one of the things that also aided me in my career was changing my name. I feel like I feel more like a Wesley

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than I ever did a Ryan. And so I could kind of exist in that realm that like, I don't know that I ever would have changed my name had that not happened. So weird, funny, silly blessing. But yeah, it was just it was. It was so funny.

Gillian Pensavalle [00:51:45] Oglethorpe just had to say it again, because I'll never get over it. All right. Next week, I'll be back with Wesley for part two. Their deep diving, the audition process for Hamilton. We go behind the scenes of the play and all the wild things that go on backstage, you know, like sliding down banisters, the ongoing game of tag and other ways to keep the show fun and fresh eight times a week. Plus the noticeable changes happening since productions have reopened. More Odie stories. And Wesley takes questions from the Patreon peeps. So until then, stay safe. Stay healthy. Thank you so much for listening. I love you. I'll see you next week. I'm G. Pen

[00:52:43]

Gillian Pensavalle: 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. A big thank you to Jenson Parker Neal, my dear friend and right hand man who helps me make the thing about the thing. To become a Patreon Peep and join the best, kindest and most welcoming corner of the internet. Go to patreon.com/TheHamilcast. You can submit questions to guests, join Zoom Hangouts, get behind the scenes access and of course, my endless gratitude. On social media at the pod is @TheHamilcast and I'm @gillianwithag G-I-L-L-I-A-N-W-I-T-H-A-G. Visit THEHAMILCAST.COM for episodes, transcripts and more. You can see what's going on with Mike, you know Mike, at MichaelPaulSmith.Net True Crime Obsessed is my true crime comedy podcast with my podcast soulmate, Patrick Hinds, and we were the first podcast to ever play Broadway. Ever. Thank you so much for listening. It means the world to me. To the revolution!