

PODCAST Episode 429

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Luminato Festival, accessibility, audio description, blind community, Toronto, arts and culture, inclusive story hour, sonification, Chandra X-ray Observatory, NASA, podcast, disability collective, burlesque drag show, immersive sound, creative problem solving.


SPEAKERS

Christine Malec, Ryan Fleury, Steve Barclay, Speaker 2, Rob Mineault


 **Rob Mineault** 00:17
Hey and welcome to another episode of AT Banter,

 **Steve Barclay** 00:22
Banter ...

 **Rob Mineault** 00:26
Wow, wow. Changing it up, both of you guys. It's like you guys rehearse without me. Either that or or it is the effect of of an 8am show, and everybody's just shot out of a cannon.

 **Christine Malec** 00:37
more cowbell. We need more cowbell.

 **Ryan Fleury** 00:41
See, your audience demands it.

 **Steve Barclay** 00:44
Yeah.

R

Rob Mineault 00:48

Hey, this is, of course, the podcast where we talk with advocates and members of the disability community to educate and inspire better conversation about disability. Hey, my name is Rob Mineault. I'm surprised I got that right. And hey, joining me today at this fine hour, Mr. Ryan Fleury.

R

Ryan Fleury 01:08

Yeah, I'm a little surprised you got that right too.

R

Rob Mineault 01:11

Yeah. Okay, whatever. And hey, look who else it is in his pajamas. Mr. Steve Barclay.

S

Steve Barclay 01:19

Where?

R

Ryan Fleury 01:22

There, in his pajamas

R

Rob Mineault 01:23

Probably recording from his bed.

S

Steve Barclay 01:26

I don't see him.

R

Rob Mineault 01:29

I Well, hey, how are you guys this fine, sunny morning?

R

Ryan Fleury 01:34

Fabulous.

S

Steve Barclay 01:36

Yeah, I'm semi awake.

R

Rob Mineault 01:40

Yeah. Are you guys finding it's getting too hot? Has the heat affected you yet?

S

Steve Barclay 01:46

I set up air conditioners yesterday.

R

Rob Mineault 01:48

Yeah, I guess it's gonna be a hot summer.

R

Ryan Fleury 01:51

It's supposed to break on Thursday, I believe, and get cooler again.

S

Steve Barclay 01:55

Yep.

R

Rob Mineault 01:56

Whenever I saw the alarming, the alarming phrase that you never want to see on your weather app, which is extreme weather event. No, sorry, it wasn't extreme. It was just a weather event. Which is bad enough. Well, anyways, we've talked about the weather. Listen, actually I want a hockey update, because I have a feeling that I'm inching closer. I'm going to be dancing around in a victory dance soon.

S

Steve Barclay 02:29

Not the way they played last night.

R

Rob Mineault 02:31

Oh, really?

S

Steve Barclay 02:33

Yeah, 6-1, they got crushed.

Yeah, 0-1, they got spanked.

R

Rob Mineault 02:38

Oh, really? Just keeping it interesting perhaps.

R

Ryan Fleury 02:41

That's exactly right. That's exactly what they're doing. They're keeping it interesting. They're building drama.

R

Rob Mineault 02:47

Anyways, okay, when we get down the hockey rabbit hole, you notice me. Look at look at me. Like bringing up hockey. See, when I have like, a \$20 Amazon gift card on the line, everything's changed.

R

Ryan Fleury 03:01

Well, we've been pushing into sports for 10 years now, it's about time.

R

Rob Mineault 03:05

Yeah, well, let's see, there you go. Actually, I'm open to bribery. So anyways, hey Ryan?

R

Ryan Fleury 03:13

Hey Steve.

R

Rob Mineault 03:15

Now, listen, don't screw around at eight o'clock in the morning. What the heck are we doing today? Today,

R

Ryan Fleury 03:26

I think we are introducing a new quarterly segment called 'What's new with you?' surprise. And so today's guest is returning, of course, to AT Banter to share with us what she's been up to for the past couple years at least. I think since we've had her on, you may have heard her on AMI, you may have heard her doing audio description. You may have even heard her busking outside of some subway station somewhere. Christine Malec, welcome back to the show. Hello.

C Christine Malec 03:55

Thank you. It's great to be here, and there has been about seven references already to the fact that it's 8am for you guys. So I'll just, I'll just, like, step up and say it's my fault because I'm in Eastern time. So thanks for stepping up so early. I would have trouble with that, but you guys are heroes. I hate mornings. I'm not a morning person. Like the perfect time for me to be starting my working day is 11 o'clock.

R Rob Mineault 04:20

Yeah, at least it's only a three hour time difference for you. It's really bad when we talk to people in the UK or something, show for because it's like 4pm to them, and they're not sympathetic at all. At least you, you remember what it was like at 8am because it was only three hours ago for you.

C Christine Malec 04:41

Well, I was sleeping, but you know, still I would remember if I had been awake.

R Rob Mineault 04:47


All right. Well, let's get started. Maybe for anybody in our audience who hasn't heard your previous appearances, let's just give you a give them a little bit of a snapshot of who you are and what some of the things are that you get up to,

C Christine Malec 05:03

Sure. So my name is Christine Malec. I'm a member of the blind community living in Toronto, and I am, I guess I call myself an arts consultant, because I work with arts and science organizations to help them make their content more accessible for a blind and low vision audience, but I'm also a creator. I'm a storyteller and writer, and as you mentioned, thanks very much for bringing that up. I'm a busker. I'm a musician in the Toronto subway system. So I do a lot of different things. I also narrate some audio description, so the as as many people will know, the person who writes the audio description isn't necessarily the person whose voice narrates it. So I'm very, very honored to be able to do some of some of that work as well. And at this time of year, I'm all about the Luminato Festival. So this is a festival that I work on each year and in various capacities to to bring the festival alive for blind and low vision audiences.

R Rob Mineault 06:09


Well, maybe that's a good place to start. Let's talk a little bit about about the festival, and then we can dive in a little bit more about about your sort of role in in helping make those events accessible.

 Christine Malec 06:20

Yes. So the Luminato Festival has been going on for several years and happens every June, and it brings art and culture to a lot of different places in the city. So the art and culture might consist of plays, concerts, art installations, discussions, walks, uh, lots of different types of performance art. And this year it's spanning over from June 4 to June 22 and the theme of the festival this year is the 24 hour city. And I really like this. It's kind of a nod to the fact that in a big city, there's stuff going on all the time, and most of us may be sleeping at night, but there's a whole other life that happens when it gets dark, and not just the social life or the bars, but infrastructure and people who work to keep that infrastructure flowing. So the events this year are keeping that in mind. And the Festival opened with something called dawn chorus and I, we were sort of giggling before, before taping about early mornings and how I hate them, but I did get up at six in the morning last week, because what happened was Luminato organized to have five choirs roaming around in Union Station. So Union Station is a transit hub. There's the city subway, there's the commuter trains, there's the UP Train that goes to the airport, and there's via which goes across the country. So it's a real transit hub. And they had five choirs starting singing at 7:30am and they moved around the space, and by 830 they were all in one place, singing, and I have to say, ecstatic. The acoustics were amazing. And then the opposite of that is something I really want to come back to this, because there's some great tie ins for the blind community, but something called Night Shifts. And this is of series of photographs of night workers. And they are be, they put, been put up at five different subway stations around the city. And so the the kind of intention of the festival is, you can go look for art and culture, but art and culture can also just pop up unexpectedly. And what happens when, when you do that, when you put art sort of in the way of people, and then they're, they're, you can't, they can't help but notice it. And how does that change their day, their outlook, their perspective. So that's the the theme of the festival this year.

 09:07


Wow, see Vancouver needs to steal this idea, because it sounds like an amazing Festival.

 Christine Malec 09:13

It's rich. It's full of it's full of content and thought provoking stuff. So I've, I've been doing work with the Festival, but also attending events just as the festival progresses and I'm just blown away like I my head, I'm overflowing with ideas and experiences and thoughts and reactions, because it's just one amazing piece of art and thought provoking cultural stuff after another.

 Rob Mineault 09:45

Well, and what I find interesting, the more I sort of dig into this, is that I'm also very impressed at just how important accessibility is to the folks that do the organizing. Can you speak a little bit to that?

 Christine Malec 09:58

I can. The Festival is outstanding in this regard. And what they did was, a few years ago, they put together an Access Advisory, and this was a group of people from various parts of the disability community to talk about how the festival, not just the programming, but how the festival organization itself could be more accessible. And so from a blind and low vision perspective, what we did was we came up with the idea of a podcast, because not, not everyone's going to make it out to every performance. And even if a performance is audio described, there's always more. There's always more to talk about. There's a deeper dive to take, and some of the stuff is just not going to be accessible. So for example, this with night shifts, what we did was, so there's these photographs up in this in the transit system, if you're blind or low vision, you're not even going to know they're there. If per chance you knew they were there, you might. I'm just going to explain what we did, because it was really great. So JJ Hunt is an audio describer, and he's one of the co-hosts. The podcast is called, is called LuminoCity, spelled with a C in order to highlight the city aspect. And JJ Hunt is one of the co-hosts, and we went together with a microphone and my iPhone. We went to the stations, and I took a picture of the picture, and I gave that to to Be My Eyes, and got a description. Then JJ looked at the description, and we talked about it, and he said, Okay, what strikes you? And then I would I would express something, and he said, and then I would say, what strikes you, what did it get wrong? And so this episode just came out today. It's called Night Shifts, and this is a series of me and JJ at different stations photographing these, these images that are put up for people to be thinking about and then talking about them. And this is something JJ and I have done a ton of talking about with each other, which is AI, the end of audio describers career? And our conclusion is, no, it's not. And when you listen to this episode, you'll know why, because there's some really, really great differences. Other things that can happen, accessibility wise, if you're blind or low vision, you can you know when you're trying to book things, like, it's concert tickets or something, and there's this whole cognitive load of like, okay, is this site accessible? Is this, am I going to be able to do this smoothly? How long is it going to take me if you want to go to Luminato shows, there's an email address, just say I'd like to go to this, this, this, this, and this. She'll sort it out for you. She'll reserve the audio description device. And you can even say, listen, I'm coming on the transit or I'm getting out of a car in front of the building. Can someone meet me? And they have volunteers who are trained with sighted guide technique, and they will meet you. They'll escort you into the theater. They'll help you get a drink, use the restroom, find your seat, get you back out at the end. And so it's accessibility at the top level. You couldn't, you couldn't ask for better. And the coup de grace, this is the most amazing. There's an outdoor space called the Luminato hub, and this is a space right downtown where there's a focus of where some of the art and live music is, if you want to go there on your own, which I'm going to do. I do this every year. I pick a time, I let Emily know, and they arrange a Whisper Guide. And this means that someone will meet me at wherever I say, like I'm getting off at this station, whatever, and they will just walk with me through the space. They'll describe what's happening. There'll be a sighted guide for me if I want to check out the food trucks, if I want to have a seat and have a drink and listen to some music for a while, they're just my guide for the experience. And I've never had that level of independence where I could just decide I want to go on my own. And it's not that I crave to go places on my own, but sometimes you just like, I mean social stuff, you know, you usually want to go with friends or whatever, but it's incredible to have this opportunity where I can just go and have a guide set up and have an independent experience, if I choose. So I've been a consultant on some of this stuff, but my my primary work with the Festival is is as one of the co-hosts of the LuminoCity podcast.

We very rarely hear like such a gold standard, of of accessibility, for for a Festival, or even for even just like a one shot event. So I guess my first question is, how did this happen? What made the festival organizers really stand up and go, okay, you know, we really need to go, you know, really make this, this experience accessible. How do we do that? Because even organizations that do want to do the right thing, very rarely do they manage to do it. The success in this is the consultation part. And a lot of a lot of organizers and a lot of organizations don't necessarily do that. So what's your what's your take on that? How did this sort of come about to such an amazing, amazingly accessible event?

C Christine Malec 15:31

I think it was just the right people in the right place at the right time. I was brought into the first year when they had the access advisory, and I just found myself in a room full of diverse, energetic, dynamic people and the festival organizers, I think, and I have to give them credit for this part too, because this started pre-pandemic, and as many of us know, the pandemic was a time when accessibility and inclusion came more to the forefront, which was amazing. But Luminosity had started to do this before, before the pandemic. So I have to just, I would, I would just have to say it's the right people at the right place and time who understood that what was happening, like having one or two audio described performances, or maybe one ASL performance, or one venue that you know was accessible by wheelchair, or just one relaxed performance. It wasn't quite enough, and they could do better. And so I think there was just the right people who had the will, and they gathered more of the right people who were great advocates for accessibility and inclusion.

R Rob Mineault 16:49

If only the entire Province of Ontario could take a to take from these people, because it is and it is so rare, and we do need to call out, you know, lack of accessibility when it happens, but we also really need to scream from the rafters when somebody does it, right?

C Christine Malec 17:08

Yes, yes. And one of the things that happens, and especially in the podcast, is where you see this is that not only is it, you know, the events themselves are accessible, but the ideas become accessible. And this happens in a couple of ways. One of them is, okay, so one episode this that I was, uh, tasked with this year was about rainbows. There's an art installation that has a heavy theme of rainbows, and it's not a nod to to Queer Pride, so much as it's a talking about how our brains react. How can we achieve a state of peace and serenity in our brains? And this Hiromi Tango, the artist feels that for her one way is the visual cortex and rainbows. So I got to talk with her and say I didn't have to pretend I was, you know, a CBC reporter or something. I could just be myself and say, okay, so I'm blind. Describe a rainbow to me. How does that make you feel? What other ways do you think you could feel the same way without the rainbow, without, without being sight centered. And so that is one way that we get to expand the idea of Accessible Arts. Is not only the piece itself. The piece itself is being described by JJ hunt, and he's also leading a guided walk through all three of their of her installations. But then there's this podcast where, if you're blind, you can dive in and start thinking about, how can I make sense of this? How can I make sense of this piece? And what it does is it gives us as a

community a voice and a place at the table, but it also expands the conversation to, firstly, to other podcast listeners who are experiencing an idea from a different perspective. But it's also a case where so many times I hear this from people that we interview, they say I've never been asked that before, and it's because usually when they're interviewed, it's by able-bodied, sighted people, and they get sort of the same flow flotilla of questions and and that's fine, but it's expanding the the perspective that you look at art from. And I my, my new tagline this year is that it's sort of doing what art is meant to do, which is exactly that sort of expand the perspective, the place from which we can understand art. And I would say, for me, that's I mean, be going to a show with audio description, having a guide is incredibly empowering. But even more empowering is to approach an artist, host or a producer, as myself as a blind person, and ask the questions that I really want to ask, not just so what inspired you to do this work? I mean, that's an important question. But you know, okay, how can I experience a rainbow like the thing that you experience when you look at a rainbow? How work with me? And let's think about how someone who is not sighted could experience that. So it's it's accessibility in in a really deep way.

R

Rob Mineault 18:08

I would think that it, it must be kind of exciting for the artists, because it's almost like an additional medium that they're that they're working in, like they're having this whole community engaging with their work on a completely different level. And so as an artist, I would imagine that that that can be fairly exciting.

C

Christine Malec 20:27

Their reactions are genuinely - I'll just say it - my benchmark is, can I make them cry? And I have achieved it a couple of times. So a few years ago I interviewed Edward Burtynsky, who's a very well known photographer, and he photographs the the natural world and the the effects that human civilization has on the natural world. And he's so well known that he didn't attend the production meeting himself. He had a couple of staff, people who were and so I had submitted my questions ahead of time, and we're in the production meeting, both of his assistants were in tears, and I just was like, what? But they are. They work with this very well known guy. They've done a million interviews and press releases, but my questions were just fresh, I guess, to them, and they, the questions that I came to the interview with, were impactful to them in ways that that were really, you know, surprising to me. But, yeah, that's become my benchmark. Can I make them cry, but then I get to speak with, say, dancers and choreographers. And last year, I was interviewing a dancer, and I said, I know you're not trained as an audio describer, but could you take the first 30 seconds of your piece and describe it for me? What what you know? What are you doing? And he he made a really valiant effort, and I could tell he was completely engaged. But in the end, he said, This is really hard, possible, maybe impossible, because if I could put it into words, I'd be a poet. And so you get these moments of artists really thinking more deeply about their work, not necessarily than they've thought, but just thinking deeply in ways that they don't typically get invited to think about it.

R

Rob Mineault 22:48

So since they've sort of brought in the Accessibility Council, and they've made all these changes, what's kind of been the response from your vantage point, from the community, have

people really get excited about this festival every year.

S

Speaker 2 23:02

One thing, particularly this year that's a new a new thing for the the festival is JJ has done Described walks in Toronto, and they've typically been sponsored by the CNIB or the CCB Toronto Visionaries, and they're always packed out. They're always completely sold out. And these are guided walks through a particular neighborhood where JJ does his research. So he's telling us about where we are and what happens here, what has happened here in the past. But it's also filled with description. It's description rich, and these are super popular in the community. So this year, when we were planning the, you know, the sort of accessibility team was talking about, okay, what is the community like most what really works? And I spoke up and said, JJ Walks are great. So now there are three described walks as part of the Festival. So there's one that's happening in a cemetery, one that is happening to guide people through the rainbow art installations, and then one that's happening at Harbourfront to talk about the sort of live events going on there. And so it's an example of the festival really listening to the community and finding out what, you know, what? What is it that's the most popular thing? What do people really, really be interested in? And there's, there's a great turnout for that. So yeah, the Described Walks could turn out to be the accessibility hit of the Festival.

R

Rob Mineault 24:44

See, that's so amazing. And as you're, as you're describing all this, you know, my mind is, is kind of blown. You know, we've been talking recently about a lot of, a lot of the city districts here in Vancouver, and how, you know, they all are supposed. To have, as deemed by new, new accessibility legislation, everybody's supposed to have these, these Accessibility Councils. And, you know, it's so hard to dig up information on who's even on these committees, what they're doing, what they're up to. I get the sense that they're all just meeting in rooms and looking each other, and just, you know, eating Timbits and drinking some coffee, waiting for the hour to go by and and that's it. Nobody, you know, knows what that what the hell to do. And it's just, and then you hear something like this, where somebody is doing it so, right. And so well. And it's just like, man, we if we could just clone these people, or at least set up some sort of a blueprint to say, this is how you do accessibility. And you know, it's not rocket science. You go, you go to the community. You ask, what do you need? You ask the questions - you don't sit around in a room and just, you know, stare at your belly button for an hour and try to figure out what the community needs.

C

Christine Malec 26:03

Yeah, absolutely. And this is why Luminato was so successful - everyone on the the access team, well, most of us are, you know, have some disability and, or are members of, you know, the disability community. So there's our hosts are myself and Ramya, who will be known to people from AMI and then audio describers JJ hunt and Rebecca Singh, so we're all people from, you know, within, within the access community and the the access team, who's, who's sort of running accessibility, they also are members of the disability community. So that's, that's how you do it. It's really simple. You just include the people who you're working for. That's, that's really basic.

R

Ryan Fleury 26:49

I'm assuming there's an Arts Council of Toronto or Ontario. Have they been approached about introducing inclusion and more accessibility exhibits or venues into other festivals like this?

C

Christine Malec 27:05

What there is, is this the Toronto Arts Council, and so when, if that's a grant administering organization. So I have one project pending, one project that's kind of in process with them, so they definitely have inclusion in mind and in the following ways. So when I apply for a grant, I can get \$500 to pay an assistant to help me. And that was life changing, because that process is serpentine, and having assistance with that is amazing. When you apply for a grant as an artist, there is also a separate from the grant fund. There's another fund you can apply for, for accessibility needs that you have as an artist. And then, once you are producing your art, you are strongly encouraged to consider accessibility and inclusion. That part is not baked in. But where, where the Toronto Arts Council really shines is, if you are an artist with a disability, they've really stepped up to help make the process much more feasible for you. So, yeah, I've just that's a road I've been traveling for the last year or so, is how to navigate that process. So if a festival is motivated, it has to come from the artists, really. And so if your festival is motivated to to incorporate disabled artists and producers, then that's, that's where, sort of where it starts. And then accessibility is something that you work through as your project develops.

R

Rob Mineault 28:47

It must be like a bit of a thrill as an artist who but as well as the the folks on the the accessibility council, when they're able to take something that on the surface would be like, this is just inaccessible, like, there's no way we're going to be able to make this accessible and then making it accessible.

C

Christine Malec 29:08

Yes, yes, yes. And we talk about this, especially JJ and I, because we're, we've, we're colleagues on a few, like, several other things. And we just, we just talk a lot, and he talks about this, and it's especially in a way, I think maybe there's a way in which he finds it even more satisfying, because he's a sighted guy who's been spending his whole career trying to do this. And I think when as as that person, when you land in an organization that's really willing to listen and work with you and listen to the community he is, he's finding his work way more satisfying in the last few years than he ever has, because of this, this innovative, innovative sort of approach. And so here's a great example. This is not Luminato related, but on June 25 in Toronto, at the buddies and bad times theater, there's a Burlesque Drag Show. And if you want to find a genre where blind people have never been included in description, that's one of them. Like, do we even know what Burlesque is like? So this is a the disability collective. Is a group in Toronto that is sort of they provide access for the Bloom and Auto Festival, and they're a group of three fabulous humans who are doing lots of stuff to make arts accessible. So they are behind the accessibility for this thing. It's called kryptonite, and it's a dozen or so burlesque and drag

performers, and what the accessibility will be is JJ will be live describing this burlesque drag show. But also there's a couple of podcasts ahead of time that will be on the disability collective's website where JJ talks about burlesque, what the visuals are, what the classic moves are, what, some what, what the vibe is, how the visual esthetic gets created. And then he and I interview one of the burlesque performers from a blindness perspective, like, okay, describe your costume. And this is, that's when you talk about, like, the thrill. That's it, because we're taking a genre that there's very little, there's, I think in Britain, there's been a couple of described burlesque shows, but very, very uncommon. And so the extremely innovative. And it's this moment where our community has never had access to this before. And so here's JJ, ready to describe and myself consulting on, what do I need to know? What do I not know? And so for JJ, you know, consulting with me is essential because, or someone from the blind community is essential because, as a sighted person, there's so many aspects of Burlesque that even if you don't give a crap about burlesque, you've seen it, you know what a fan dance is, or all of these things that you've just seen in popular culture. I don't, I didn't know what a fan dance was. And so there's a ton of visual language and just visual esthetics that I don't know anything about. And so this is totally new ground. And yeah, it's, it's pretty great to be, to be on the ground floor of something like that,

R

Rob Mineault 32:19

Yeah and over the years, you know, we've, we've talked to, you know, to many folks in the in the Arts Community. As we're talking, it really kind of strikes me that the arts and accessibility have very often, really worked together. And I'm wondering, you know, why? What's the difference between the arts and I don't know city governments? Why can't we take the blueprint that that arts festivals and, you know, arts related organizations have been doing for years and and transpose that onto city planning?

C

Christine Malec 33:00

Yes, I do have thoughts. And this is you make an excellent point, which I will deepen by pointing out that in my experience in Toronto, the organizations apart from Luminato, because Luminato is pretty big and it's exceptional, but in general, the other organizations I consult with, the smallest ones are the most interested in accessibility. The ones with the least amount of funds to make it happen are the most motivated. Mirvish productions - they're better now. They have Gala Pro so you can get description for the large productions that they do, but that's very recent. They have lots of money, but they just weren't motivated. And so I think if I had to point to a reason, I would say, I would reiterate what you said is that people in the arts are, in general, more lefty, I would say, more inclusive, more empathetic. It would be a huge generalization to say artists are more empathetic, but I'm just going to throw that out there as a point of contention if anyone wants to debate it, because it's been my experience that you're right. Arts organizations are just more people focused and little less hierarchical, little less bureaucratic. I mean, any large organization is going to get bureaucratic, but it depends, you know what, what your motivation is. So, yeah, I guess I'll leave it there, just to say that my experience, my in my little, tiny corner of the world is that the people who were on at ground level, if you know what I mean, they're the most motivated because they, they they're looking right into the faces of other people, whereas someone at the top of Mervish Productions is is

looking into the face of, you know, different people who are a bit more privileged. So it's, it's the people, I would say who are involved. And there's, yeah, there's just artists just have a broader, more inclusive outlook on the world.

R

Rob Mineault 35:09

Yeah, and I suppose that, you know, with artists, you know, they come up against a roadblock, and they want to solve it. They thrive on being creative. Obviously, that's, that's why they're in the arts. So, you know, when they come up against an accessibility roadblock, you know, their their first reaction is like, Well, how can I fix this?

C

Christine Malec 35:28

Yeah, and there's, there's just more. I think, for artists, part of the creative process is, maybe this is way too generalized. But our art, creating art, requires a certain amount of empathy, even if it's only okay I'm reading this script, what is this character feeling? How do I convey that? Like that's you may not be the most warm hearted, gushy person in the world, but if you're trying to create art, there's a certain amount of for some of the arts, there's a certain amount of empathy, and you're right Creative Problem Solving as well. So yeah, I think artists just approach this with the and artists in general are a more diverse community than you would find in a bank, say, people working at a bank. I can't speak to why that is, but in the arts community, you're just, you just find more diversity of all kinds, and so it creates a culture of diversity and tolerance that in the right circumstances, plays out as how can we make our work more accessible to more people.

R

Rob Mineault 36:39

So speaking of creative, I did notice something on your bio when I was reading through it that I really wanted to ask about, because I really find it fascinating. You also do some work with an X Ray Observatory, doing audio description of astronomical images. Can you, can you talk a little bit about that? Because I find that really fascinating.

S

Speaker 2 36:57

Oh, I can talk a lot about that. So I'm a real space geek. Astronomy and Space Exploration have always been things I'm super interested in. And the short version is that I have two ways that I work with different limbs of NASA. So the Chandra X Ray Observatory is part of NASA, and they are taking images from the sky, but they're not photographs. They're not data that anyone could see with your eye. And so what happens when these get translated for the public? A visualization scientist takes this data and figures out how to convey it in a visual way. So then you get images like, oh, the James Webb Telescope just took this, you know, image of distant galaxies. So it's someone taking the data and massaging it into a way that sighted people can see it. There's two things that can happen from there. One is a sighted person can make a really rich verbal description of that image, so that you get some of the science and you get a description of the visual. So JJ and I work on this together. So he writes the descriptions, and then I consult on them from a blindness perspective, like how can and this involves sort of how

to use language very precisely, because science writing is just different. And so the other piece that I get to consult on is a sonification, and this means taking the same data, but instead of translating it into visual wavelengths, you turn it into audio. And Matt Russo, who is an astrophysicist and a musician, does this work, and so he'll take an image from some kind of observing tool and translate it into sound. So you might have points of light the stars, they're represented as little ping sounds. The gaseous nebula might be of a swell of a cello, and the sound might pan from left to right, and the pitch might indicate the brightness. And so all of this data can be translated into sound. And so my, my excellent, Oh, I love this work is he'll send me a sonification with the scientific write up as to what it is and what it's meant to represent. And my, my great honor, is to be able to say, as a blind person, this part is a bit unclear. Or could you use a different instrument, or could you change the pitch? Or could you pan this in a different way? And I'm just going to make a tie back to Luminato, because I'm obsessed with this idea. On the weekend, there was a performance called immersed, and it was a CD release party held in a new venue that has 38 speakers that. Are all around you and above you, and so it's completely immersive surround sound. And what I'm longing to make happen, and I'm committed. I'm going to make this happen. I want Matt Russo to to produce a show of his sonifications, because a planetarium is a completely visual experience where people get to be immersed visually in in the cosmos. And what I want now that this space exists with this surround sound, Dolby Atmos, you know, a million speakers, I want a sonified experience of the cosmos. And so I've already started the wheel spinning. I'm connecting people and saying, Okay, let's, let's, let's think about this. Because I love astronomy and space exploration stuff, and I feel so fortunate that I get to be a consultant for for making that stuff more accessible for our community.

S

Steve Barclay 40:55

I'd like to volunteer Ryan to play cowbell for that initiative.

S

Speaker 2 40:59

A cowbell. Yes, we need more cowbell. Everything needs more cowbell.

R

Rob Mineault 41:04

Okay, we'll have to figure out what heavenly body the cowbell represents - a supernova, maybe. And I didn't even realize when they, when they said, Oh, you know, the web telescope took a picture of this and you, you know, you see whatever you the red, the red, fuzzy blob. I always just thought, okay, well, that's, that's the picture. I didn't actually realize it that that's, that's visually massaged.

C

Christine Malec 41:32

Some stuff from the Hubble is photograph, like some, some of that is direct. But for the most part, whenever NASA releases images, they're complete, they're they're curated. And I'm not saying they're not accurate, but they're they're completely curated. They're taking data and transforming it into wavelengths that, and that's perfectly, you know, valid. It's still the valid

data, but it's not the data the instrument is sending back that's being manipulated to be perceivable by the senses. And, you know, visualization, because most people are sighted, that's how it's always been done, is in images, but you can also and it's shockingly popular. The sonifications were initially done for the blind and low vision community, but they went viral, and everyone involved with the project was shocked at how popular these images are, because lots of people they you know, they may have sight, but they like to center other senses as well.

R

Rob Mineault 42:30

100%. And whenever you know, it seems to me that whenever we have something become more accessible. Audio description is even a great example. I know a lot of sighted people who do that. It just makes everybody's life better. And so, you know, it just, it really, I think it really does feed into this idea of universal design. Is just the way to go. It just makes everybody's life better across the board.

C

Christine Malec 42:57

yes, yeah, totally agree.

R

Rob Mineault 43:00

So now the festival, it's running all month, so I guess you're kind of in the middle of it right now.

C

Christine Malec 43:07

It's true. I it's most of the events are on the weekends this year, which is a bit of a relief. So my weekend was packed out with incredibly intense, immersive experiences that have just sort of left my mind reeling. So I have a few more work things, but also a few more shows. And one of the Yeah, JJ is describing a dance show this, this festival, which is a bit of a departure for him, and it's a real experiment, because that's another thing: the festival allows us to experiment a bit, and it's a whole rabbit hole of describing dance, but it's typically been fairly literal, and this year, we're experimenting with, what if we made it less literal, like literal, but also some emotion and some expressiveness on the part of the describer, like, can we? Can we make description a craft, but also its own art form. And so that's coming up. I'm really looking forward to that. But yeah, there's there's just arts and culture all over the place, and I super stimulating time of year. I it's the kind of time of year for me where at the at the end of each day, I just sort of put my head under my pillow and don't talk too much, because my brain is so overflowing with experiences and people I've met or shows I've seen, or ideas I've been exposed to, or people I've spoken with, and it's incredibly provocative, stimulating, rich, a rich, a rich time of year for the city and for me especially well.

R

Rob Mineault 44:39

What's the planning like? I imagine that, you know, the festival happens, and then it's probably right back to work planning for next year's.

C

Christine Malec 44:45

Pretty much, yeah, I think people maybe take a bit of a like July and August. But yeah, the planning is ongoing, and the Luminato Festival, the organization, also does a lot of chatting and collegial things. With other festivals around the world. So there's activity going on all year, whether it's building relationships with artists around the world or curating shows for next year. But yeah, absolutely, there's a ton of planning that goes goes into it.

R

Rob Mineault 45:15

And so other than the festival and what else are you up to? What's what's sort of top of your list these days, aside from, from all the all the Luminato stuff?

C

Christine Malec 45:26

I'm working on a really fun project with a collective called described Toronto. So that's myself, audio describer, Rebecca Singh and sort of event planner, Catherine Sanders. And what we're doing is we're planning an event that's going to take place in an Art Park in Toronto. It's we're calling it the inclusive story hour. And what it is is we're taking the land that the park is on as the inspiration. So the prompt is for a group of storytellers take create create a story that happens or happened on this particular piece of land in the past, present or future, that involves a meeting or a parting. So I'm one of the storytellers, and the inclusiveness of it is the space is completely accessible, but also the intention with the storytellers is to include a lot of descriptive language. So instead of just saying a butterfly flew by, you might, you know, you would describe the butterfly so inclusive in that way. And so I'm working on my own story, which is set in the future on that particular piece of of land. And the idea is, is kind of, well, it's an inclusive story hour. But our theme is that there's a land you know, you can do a land acknowledgement, but what if your entire performance piece is a land acknowledgement? So that's our intention. Is to make an inclusive event where the whole piece is an acknowledgement of the land that we're on. And then also I'm working, I'll be setting in a turbo mode in a little while. About this one, I'm working on a grant application for something called animating historic sites. And this, what I'm hoping this will turn into is, there's a Brickworks, a historical it's not a functioning Brickworks anymore, but to a historic site in Toronto, and what I want to do is to invite audio describers and storytellers to pick maybe five points over the history of that spot and create stories of based sort of on research, but, you know, historical fiction type stories that will be told live on in the location and also with built in description. So a describer taking, okay, what would this place have looked like in 1540 you know, and try and extrapolate and incorporate some descriptions. So those are once Luminato is wound up. I'll be focusing more on on those projects, but I have my story written for for September 27 and on Friday, I'll be hanging out my backyard with my good friend Dan Yashinsky, who's a well known storyteller in Toronto, and I'll be rehearsing my story with him and getting feedback on that. So looking forward to both of those things as well.

R

Rob Mineault 48:29

We're gonna have to have you back to talk about that, because that sounds really fascinating,

too.

C Christine Malec 48:32

Yeah, thank you. I'd love to .

R Rob Mineault 48:34

Well listen, best of luck with the rest of the festival. Best of luck with the podcast. You know, it really sounds seems like the, you know, the podcast is an excellent sort of addendum to to what's going on in the Festival, because you know, over here in Vancouver, I can't, obviously experience the the festival, so I'm going to be listening to the podcast.

C Christine Malec 48:57

I hope so. It's not just like you definitely don't need to be going to the festival and attending events for these episodes to be resonant The episodes, I have to say they're really great this year, and I'm very, very proud of the work that we've done. So I hope people will will give it a listen if you're a podcasty person.

R Rob Mineault 49:14

Absolutely. And you know me, maybe use this opportunity where can people find the podcast and information about Luminato if they do happen to be over there in Toronto and don't know about it.

C Christine Malec 49:27

Yeah, so the Luminato Festival, it's luminatofestival.com. The podcast, again, is called LuminoCity. And also, I'll just give a shout out for the Disability Collective, because they're, they're doing the burlesque stuff, and they've done some great work on accessible stand up comedy. And they also have some some podcasts. So those are places people can check out.

R Rob Mineault 50:04

Excellent. Christine Malec, thank you once again for taking some time out of your obviously busy schedule to chat with us.

C Christine Malec 50:12

It was a pleasure.



Rob Mineault 50:14

And yeah, let's have you back on and talk more about it, because you always seem to have something interesting going on, unlike us.



Christine Malec 50:22

Oh, please, thank you. It's always, it's always a treat. Thanks for having me on.



Rob Mineault 50:27

Awesome. Thanks, Christine, and this will air next week. Best of luck. And you're up to you've, you've already inspired me to, like, have you know a dozen things I'm saying, we need to do that over here.



Christine Malec 51:00

Right on. Well, you're hooked up with vocal. I know that. So they're, they're the starting point. Yeah, if you're interested in space stuff, check out a website called system sounds. That's Matt Russo's website, or the Chandra Observatory, but that's where you've can find the space system sounds.



Rob Mineault 51:22

All right, Christine, All right, thanks again, and best of luck.



Christine Malec 51:26

Okay, bye,



Ryan Fleury 51:27

Thanks, Chris. Bye.



Rob Mineault 51:30

That is so cool. Sonification is fascinating.



Ryan Fleury 51:35

That could be the backing track to my next song.

R Rob Mineault 51:38
That could be the new intro to AT Banter.

R Ryan Fleury 51:42
We'll just have to ask him permission to use it.

R Rob Mineault 51:49
We'll just, well, the sound of Beetlejuice. They can't copyright strike us for that. Oh, man, no, that's so cool. We oh, we need, we need something like that Luminosity Festival here.


R Ryan Fleury 52:02
Well, we may have something we just don't talk to VocalEye often enough, right? Because they're always doing something in the city. Look at the website. They're busy.


R Rob Mineault 52:11
That's your VocalEye does incredible work. But, you know, I think that the organizers of these festivals, they need to do something like the Luminato Festival has done and, you know, and obviously, and engage with, VocalEye you know, and get their get their input. I think that that's the real key to any of this, is this accessibility success is goes, goes back to again, engaging with the community, and getting fig asking the questions - what doyou need? How can we make this better? Instead of just a bunch of able bodied guys sitting around trying to figure it out it out.


R Ryan Fleury 52:55
Anyways, it sounds like you've got it figured out.


R Rob Mineault 52:58
There you go. Put me in charge.

S Steve Barclay 53:00
Get, on with it.


 Ryan Fleury 53:03
You go, Rob, you got two cups of coffee. You're ready.


 Rob Mineault 53:06
There you go. I mean, I know we have, we have festivals, like, we have the Fringe Festival, and we have a couple of film festivals, and we have a lot of, you know, we have a bunch of, like, little weekend things here and there, but I don't know if we have a month long festival like that.


 Ryan Fleury 53:24
Do we?

 Rob Mineault 53:26
I don't know. I don't think so. I mean, how long have we all lived in Vancouver? And if we don't know about a month long Arts Festival, I'm pretty sure it doesn't exist.

 Steve Barclay 53:35
Yeah, but we've got the Fringe Festival, but that's theater.

 Rob Mineault 53:40
right, right, which I know vocal, I think they do a lot of work during the Fringe Festival, for sure, so, but very cool. Well, you know, geez, if only the the Province of Ontario took some notes, maybe they, they would have met that 2025, deadline of making the province accessible. So, well, anything? Anything else to say about anything?

 Ryan Fleury 54:14
Nope, nope.

 54:15
Okay, so I want to go right back. Steve, can you tell me about my the Edmonton Oilers and where are we at with the with the series, as they call it?

 Steve Barclay 54:27
Okay, so it's a best of seven series, so Edmonton has won one game, and Boston, or sorry, not

Boston, Florida has won two games, so games behind, and they need a win.



54:48

I see, okay, alright, well, so there you go. I can't spend that \$20 yet.



Steve Barclay 54:59

Yeah. No, next week, not yet.



Rob Mineault 55:01

It'll be over by next show. Let's go.



Rob Mineault 55:08

And hey, Ryan?



Ryan Fleury 55:08

yeah, Rob?



Rob Mineault 55:09

Where can people find us?



Ryan Fleury 55:11

I don't know. Steve, where can people find us?



Steve Barclay 55:51

Oh, they can email us if they want. They can email us at cowbell@atbanter.com



Ryan Fleury 56:01

You can also find us on Facebook and Instagram, and Mastodon.



Rob Mineault 56:07

Man, Fleury is really screwing with me.

R

Ryan Fleury 56:10

Or wherever you listen to podcasts.

R

Rob Mineault 56:13

That's right, and with that, that is going to both do it for us this week. A big thanks, of course, to Christine for joining us, and we will see everybody...

R

Ryan Fleury 56:25

Next week.

S

Steve Barclay 56:28

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