

The Wheelchair Activist S4 E9 Transcript

Access in Oz: Inside the Making of Wicked with Chantelle Nassari

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Emma: Welcome to The Wheelchair Activist, a podcast hosted by me, Emma Vogelmann. And every month I interview amazing members and allies of the disabled community who are quite literally changing the world.

Well, Chantelle, thank you so, so much for joining me on this episode of The Wheelchair Activist. For the very keen listeners amongst us, um, people may already know who you are from a previous episode that we've done, but could you please introduce yourself to our lovely listeners?

Chantelle: Yeah. I'm Chantelle Nassari. I am an accessibility coordinator, and I worked on the movie Wicked. And I get involved really in advocating and, um, I'm on access forums and you know, it, it is really important to me to try and be the voice that needs to be heard with regards to the DDN community.

Emma: Mm. And how does someone who is interested in accessibility, how did you end up going into the entertainment industry?

Chantelle: You know, I think, um, I'm a wheelchair user myself. I have spinal muscular atrophy.

Emma: Same!

Chantelle: Oh, really?

Emma: Yes.

Chantelle: Um, I was diagnosed around six years old, and my mom also is in a wheelchair and she had polio when she was around the same age. So, I think 'cause she went through a very different experience of her childhood back in the late forties, fifties, sixties.

Um, she went through, kind of the special educational system as it was. And she wanted a very different life for me. So she did the extreme opposite. So I spent my entire life being in mainstream, which, you know, in the seventies and eighties, which shows my age, you know, there wasn't that much representation.

I was the only disabled person in every setting, including my schooling, that was diagnosed or that was, um, disclosed. I mean, I guess back then neurodivergence wasn't diagnosed. So, I was the only physically disabled person in the schooling. So everything I did, I, I was always adapting for myself to be included and I had this sense of my entitlement to be involved in anything I wanted.

So I trained as a dancer. I wanted to do GCSE dance and drama and art and music. And, you know, I fancied myself as the new Isadora Duncan. So contemporary dance was the direction that I headed. And so I've always been drawn to the arts anyway. And, having worked in that field and the first to take GCSE dance disabled person in the country and a-level dance, um, I was always that person.

So I think it was a natural progression for me to do that for others. Having done it for myself my whole life and advocated for my access needs and my rights to be involved to then do it for others is, is quite a natural progression for me. I, I, it's quite cathartic and healing because, you know, I see someone like Marissa and, and I want her experience to be better than mine.

I want her to be able to not have the obstacles in her way. I think all artists, shouldn't have to drain and waste their energy fighting for their rights and, and trying to find the accessible entrance. Or, you know, I think for equality, real equality, everybody enters a hundred percent. Whereas if you have wasted 20% trying to get in the building or traveling from an inaccessible parking space with no drop curb, or you know, you've lost energy and by the time you get there, you're no longer on an equal footing.

So, that was a very long answer, but...

Emma: No, it was wonderful and I think, you know, so much of what you said resonates with me personally, but I know will resonate with a lot of people listening. And with a lot of other guests actually that I've had in terms of how formative those childhood experiences are.

And I think what I really connect with in terms of what you said was that, you know, my parents, although not disabled, they also really pushed for me to be in

mainstream everything as a young person. And I don't know about you, but for me it meant that I didn't actually self-identify as disabled until my mid twenties. Which is wild 'cause I was, you know, I personally got diagnosed with SMA, uh, when I was one and I've been a wheelchair user since I was four. So, you know, to not identify with that I think really shows then how barrier free, you know, experiences were. And I think when you're a child, having your parents do that for you really then makes it sort of within you that you have to then try and do that for someone else.

Chantelle: Yeah, yeah. It's very interesting. Absolutely. I think I, I think back then it, it was quite different because in order to be seen as equal, I had to have no physical... I didn't want to be a problem. I didn't want to be difficult or trouble or complain. So, you know, it was a very different world back then. So I, I think I also, like you, I didn't really identify as being disabled.

And, you know, since working on Wicked and since meeting specifically Marissa, she's been an incredible inspiration for me just because community is so important. And I don't know why it didn't occur to me before, but since meeting her, I've really become acutely aware of how significant a community is and I feel so much safer. I feel so much more heard and, relatable. You know, I, I just, I feel like my inner child has, you know, this whole process has been quite personal for me, as well as, you know, uh, a wonderful experience and, and, you know, very exciting.

But, you know, on a healing level, it's, it's done a lot for me to just see actually at 53, I am still the only disabled person in settings, and I suddenly thought, this is, this is what's missing in my life. And so I've, I've changed all of that, and since then, I think I'm, I'm a much more centered, grounded, and, and happier individual.

Emma: Mm-hmm. I mean, I, I really agree. I think, you know, the disabled community can give such support to each other. And it's something that once I started identifying as disabled you know, started to reach out to people that I found online who had had similar experiences or, you know, face similar barriers to me, that it sort of unlocks this whole new kind of area of friendship in terms of that shared understanding. And it's incredibly powerful. And I'm curious then in terms of what you did on Wicked, because, um, for, you know, people-- don't how you wouldn't be familiar at this point, but in case you're not both films of Wicked, they have a character called Nessarose who is a wheelchair user.

And for the first time a authentically disabled person, Marissa Bode, is playing Nessarose. And I interviewed her in part of the first movie where we talked about what the filming experience was like, and a little bit of the story. Um, obviously without giving too many, you know, part two spoilers away. But I'm really interested from your perspective, what were [00:09:00] some of the things that you did to make Wicked this incredibly accessible experience for Marissa?

Chantelle: Well, I think because, production already knew they wanted to authentically cast Nessarose as a wheelchair user. The ethos was already in place, so they wanted to listen. They wanted to learn. So, you know, the, the first point for me was to reach out and to let the actors know that I was there and that any needs that they had or anything that they, I, I, I wanted them to know that I would take care of it. So they didn't have that anxiety or that stress.

Especially because it was filmed in the UK and both of the actresses who played Nessa Rose, the younger and the older, came from the states. So that journey alone, I know traveling as a disabled person, how hard that is. Especially as a disabled person who uses equipment. You know, there's a lot, a lot of anxiety connected to traveling. So I wanted them to know that they don't have to worry about that because we would take that pressure away.

So my first point, port of call, was to make contact and to say, Hey, I'm here. What do you need? And then to duplicate everything they had so that although it was an unfamiliar environment, it had their safety net. So every piece of equipment, we made sure that we could access everything that they had at home to recreate that safe space for them here. You know, the journey was quite a big deal for me.

So that was my first stop really with that. Just to say, Hey, I'm also in a wheelchair and you know, my life experience is this. You know, but also having spent my life with people saying, oh, you know, hey, what's wrong with you? You know, and me having to say, oh, nothing's wrong with me, but I'm diagnosed as having spinal muscular atrophy. 'Cause I know that's, that's what you mean when you say that. You know, I don't wanna then be that person and say, Hey, nice to meet you. What's your disability? You know, because it's irrelevant, because it's who you are as a person and I know that. So I just wanted to make sure that they didn't have to do that to lots of people and that they would disclose to one, and then I could approach whatever departments were necessary and say, this is what we need.

Emma: And I think what's so important about your approach, is that you came from it in terms of, I'm asking this because I want to provide support. And I

think that's where the comfort levels around what you share in terms of what your needs are really changes. I mean, I appreciate this isn't your standard workplace, but you know, I do a lot of sort of speaking and consulting work with workplaces and when I talk to them about how do you ask people about disability, particularly at like interviewer application stage. Are you doing it from a place of, I'm trying to find out what your needs are so I can support you to perform your best? Or am I doing it because I, for some reason, you know, need a complex medical name that will actually not mean anything to most people?

I mean, I think both of us with having SMA know how few people have actually heard of that. And so, you know, telling someone, oh, I have spinal muscular atrophy to me it's how helpful is it? Because you know how many medical professionals know about it. But if you go it from a place of, you know, I have a physical impairment and I use an electric wheelchair. You know, that's so much more information.

Chantelle: Yeah.

Emma: And so much more useful information than, you know, just, just getting a name of a disability.

Chantelle: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And also, you know, having to lead with things like, you know, my toileting needs are. You know?

Emma: Yeah.

Chantelle: And stuff like that is... non-disabled people don't have to consider disclosing their toileting needs and we shouldn't either. It should just be accessible, you know? I mean, obviously my ideal world would be that of the social model of disability where the world is accessible to all. It isn't a provision for certain people. It is just accessible across the board. And then we wouldn't be in this situation. And so I wanted to make sure that the actors that I was dealing with didn't have to go through that.

Emma: Mm. And I really liked what you said. I mean there's thoughts in there I definitely understand about, you know, travel and transport. I mean, that's my usual day job is transport. But I think as well as a wheelchair user, when you are flying, you know the fear that goes into you over the safety of your chair or of your other bits of medical equipment. And I'm sure we've both heard many horror stories, you know, about equipment and wheelchairs being broken. So, you know, even like you say, to get to the job was a potential barrier.

But I mean, you could also think that for, even if they lived in like Nottingham, you know, somewhere even within the UK that you're, you're so right. And I think it was, it was an episode that I did in possibly my second season, I think it was with, um, the late Alan Benson. But we talked about how the work of getting to work is, you know, the hard part of the day.

And I think it's so incredible then that you were able to come in from that place of empathy and understanding and be from, obviously you wanna perform, literally perform, your best here. You know, how, how can we support you to do that? But I'm curious sort of how you got involved with the production to begin with. And sort of how you went from being a performer, you know, in terms of dance and everything that you're saying, to then now being the coordinator on the other side.

Chantelle: Um, I guess I've been through lots of different kind of career moves in my life. So from being a performer, I moved, it, it was about the millennium was the time that I stopped performing. I then shifted more into teaching and I found that I had a rapport with teenagers and I really enjoyed working with teens. And then that kind of led me into children in care. And I started working a lot with children within the care system and teenagers particularly.

So teaching kind of led me into actually becoming a foster carer myself. So I then stopped working altogether and I fostered for, uh, about five, six years. And then during that time, I decided with my partner, who's no longer my partner, but at the time, um, her and I decided that we wanted to have a baby. So, using donor insemination, I became pregnant. That then became my focus. So then during raising my daughter, I then rekindled my love for cooking. And so then I moved into catering and I did some more training and I worked in catering. And then also during this time I was quite involved within the Deaf world here, and I was level three qualified in sign language, BSL.

So, you know, I had lots of things happening all at the same time, and I was finding myself advocating in different areas of my life. So I think with everything that I've done, I've, I've always been quite open to experiences and opportunities. I've never really had to kind of chase things. I find that if I just open myself opportunities will come my way. And they do, and they have, and I'm quite spiritual like that. And I've felt that when things are the right time, the right things will kind of approach.

And I don't know, some people are a bit skeptical of that, but that's very me. And so, you know, at a time in my life, um, I started looking in to being involved more locally in the access forum, um, on my local district council and

getting involved in more kinds of projects locally to make a difference. And my involvement in all of that just naturally came.

I heard that there was an access coordinator position available for this movie that I didn't— Now just, you know, jumping in with I'd never seen *Wicked* because the stage show of *Wicked* is not accessible to large electric wheelchairs. Now the irony with that, right? So I had no concept of the enormity of the project I was about to get involved in. But I knew they wanted an access coordinator.

So I emailed in. I got an interview. I came to the interview and it was great because I was kind of there very open and I wanted to hear their perspective. And it was actually that that won me over. Because they were looking at the bigger picture. And so in the interview it was, uh, David Nicksay, who, um, interviewed me and he was talking about how not only does the environment need to be accessible, but they wanted that to translate onto screen. Now you'll understand this, and for me, when I'm watching TV or I'm watching a movie, if there is no thread, like if a wheelchair user gets in a car and transfers into the back of a car, and then when the car arrives at their destination, they just get back out into the wheelchair. I'm thinking their chair didn't fit in that car. That's not, you know, and, and I'm looking at that.

And that's something I notice because I'm, you know, I'm a wheelchair user. So I know that's not authentic. And he was talking about this concept of watching on screen and thinking, you know, there is a flight of stairs here, how did she get to the top? He wanted it to look authentic to a viewer and an audience. And it was that that sold me and I thought I wanna do this. So they won me over. And it's a slightly twisted perspective because it should have been the other way around. But I had no idea of what the enormity of what I was about to embark upon. So I loved him and I thought, this is great, I wanna be involved in this. And this was precasting. They hadn't cast at that point. So I just knew they were going to cast authentically. And so yeah, so that's kind of how I got involved. It was all very organic.

Emma: I mean, what an incredibly interesting career history you've had. But I think in terms of the project, I think that was one of the things when I was speaking to Marissa that really struck me, was just how accessible everything was, and how much of a dialogue it really seemed to be. And I think, [00:21:00] you know, dialogue that involved you in terms of, you know, figuring things out, to make things accessible, to make things inclusive.

And I really, I thought it was incredible that, you know, they had an access coordinator, so, you know, all of the actors' needs were met. But I think what you just said about really wanting to translate into Oz, you know, the world that we're, that we're talking about, and make sure that that world is accessible. Because you're absolutely right, you know, as disabled people, I think if we're watching something we will notice those little inconsistencies or those things that don't quite make sense. And I think it's, it's even more so like you say, with, you know, the built environment and wheelchair users, which, you know, we both are. And when you said about, well, yeah, how does she get up that flight of stairs?

And just now that you're talking about it, I'm like seeing the scenes in my head that Nessa Rose was in and sort of thinking... The only thing in the first film that I am sort of thinking about is the boat that they take to the Oz Dust ballroom.

Chantelle: That was one of my most exciting things about working on the movie. So the, the set and props department was so creative and so forward thinking, and I met with them several times. And they wanted to make sure, like I did my vision too, was that the whole environment... You know, everyone can walk up a ramp, but a wheelchair user can't walk upstairs. You know, so have a ramp and that everyone can use. And you know, so the boat was accessible, the boat was fully wheelchair accessible and everyone could use it. Because it wasn't exclusive to a wheelchair user, it was just accessible to everyone. And I love that. Um, it was really exciting for me.

All that stuff, the water was there, that wasn't CGI, the water was there and they built a boat and I helped design the access and Marissa could get right onto that boat, but they didn't show that in the first movie, which really saddened me because that would've been a beautiful moment for wheelchair users to see Marissa on this boat with all the other actors. But I'm hoping in the second movie we'll see some of that. I don't know.

But even Shizz, even at Shizz, I love that there was one entrance and it was a ramp. And everyone used the ramp. Everyone accessed the same way. She didn't have to go round the side and find a different entrance. You know, they all entered together and it was equal footing. They introduced themselves on their first day of being a student and everyone was equal. And that's, that's my dream world.

Emma: I think, I mean, like you say, it's the world if the social model of disability was applied. And I think what we're ultimately talking about is universal design. So it's not accessible, but separate. It's just accessible for

everyone. And yeah, I, I mean now hearing, you know, that that work went into the boat, I am now going to definitely rewatch it and sort of, you know, look a bit closer.

But I think you're right, it like you say, looking for those, well, that wouldn't work kind of moments and having that, you know, not suspending disbelief. But I think what was so incredible about, like you say, the rest of the set and, you know, everywhere was that you didn't, it didn't feel clinical in terms of accessible. It wasn't, you know, like medical handrails or you know, a, a ramp with... I don't know, I'm trying, you know, I think we all know what I mean in terms of how it looks and feels.

Chantelle: Yeah.

Emma: But it was all just seamlessly built in. And I was wondering if you were able to speak a little bit about the wheelchair that was used. Because I, I know in the state's show, because, you know, I, I had the privilege of interviewing Jenna Bainbridge before she was cast as the first, you know, authentically disabled actress on Broadway to play Nessa. Um, but she's done some content around her playing the role on Broadway, and I know that there's so many intricacies that went into the wheelchair. But I'm wondering for the film, if you had any sort of tricks or insights or anything into the chair?

Chantelle: Well we tried to replicate the chair that Marissa used already, so we had the basic structure of that and then the incredibly talented design team built upon it, you know, all the detail, which, you know, was a work in progress, to see what worked for Marissa. Um, but it was all built from the basic structure of a lightweight chair. So, yeah, I mean, like, I just reiterating, they were already in that head space where it was about getting it right, rather than, you know, we want this to look right. We don't care how we get there. No, they wanted to get it right. So, yeah. So the chair was beautiful, wasn't it? It was so good.

Emma: Yeah, it, it really was. But I think, like to me, you know, it just showed how integrated everything was and just how beautifully designed. I mean I also, again, had the privilege of talking to Zak Ford Williams who was in Bridgeton. So he is a wheelchair user, um, with cerebral palsy who was in Bridgeton. And we talked about the wheelchair that was used in those scenes, and it was an actual historic wheelchair, you know, from that time.

And I was sort of thinking in terms of Oz, I mean, obviously it's not a wheelchair that we would necessarily see every day. But I think again, that's just

so how it should be. That let's go with, as a basis, what the actors already using and just make it visually look the same.

I mean, when I was a child and I did theater, I did ballet, um, but when I was on stage in a production of the Nutcracker, it was a similar thing. It was actually someone's, um, I think it was a basketball wheelchair because I think the wheels' angle were, you know, more of like a sports wheelchair as opposed to like your standard manual chair. And the way that they, you know, add like, you know, a painted washboard to the back, you know, to make it look old and all of that, and to make sure that it was still comfortable and usable. It's, you know, it, it can be done.

Chantelle: Yeah.

Emma: And I think, you know, in terms of Wicked part two is coming out. Um, we're going to be timing the release of this episode around the release of the film, which I'm desperately excited to see. But I was wondering if there's sort of anything maybe specific to the second film that you were particularly excited to work on or... You know, 'cause I appreciate spoilers and all that, will need to be managed, but I think we have to address the big controversy around the character of Nessa. You know, in terms of how Nessa hasn't been played by an authentic disabled actor really before Marissa. And that led the way for people like Jenna on Broadway, et cetera. But the controversy around the character is that Nessa is, and I'm using air quotes, "fixed." You know, that she is cured or you know, her whole life is changed by essentially magically removing her inability to walk.

I wondered if there was anything that you feel about that or anything that you're able to say about the second film. I, you know, Marissa mentioned in our previous interview that she was happy with the decision and how it was done. But I'm wondering from your perspective, how you feel about it.

Chantelle: I think that they've dealt with it really well. I can't obviously say anything, but I really love how it was in discussion. You know, it was considered involving Winnie Holzman, the writer, and Jon Chu, the director. And you know, they were all on top of that. And I think it was quite, quite a concern of the disabled community that they were gonna get that wrong. Because there is this misconception that all disabled people's dream is to not be disabled anymore, and it is quite disempowering and, uh, invalidating and negating, for us. And so I am happy with how they dealt with that.

And also, I think Marissa's very vocal and she has integrity. You know, she's gonna say what she thinks. And I think the, the disability movement needed a front person, and I think Marissa is the perfect front person for us. And she's beautiful, funny, quirky, insightful, compassionate, intelligent, articulate, you know, and I think, she was the perfect person for this. She's spoken her truth, and I think everybody will be quite pleased with the result.

Emma: I mean, yeah, of, I'm, of course, as I said, dying to see how it's handled. But I think that it has already provided me, as a disabled person, a bit of hope, I suppose, and a little bit of comfort that, I mean, even just having this conversation is so important. Because there are so many, I'm sure we could rattle off, you know, a list of films and TV shows and plays, musicals, whatever it is, where the conversation about disability with disabled people doesn't happen.

And I think, you know, of course, without knowing how this plays out, but, you know, to even start from a position of we may need to change the way that the story has typically been told. I mean, what is it? It's been 20 or 25, maybe 20 years since it premiered on Broadway. And to take something as iconic as Wicked and, you know, turn it into a film, but to then potentially change it in a way that is actually more sensitive to the disabled community, even just having that conversation is a victory. I know that's a very low bar, but truly, you know, it, it is, isn't it?

Chantelle: Yeah. It's a demonstration of how simple it can be to adjust something to make it right. And that is, is a beautiful thing because it's, it just shows the world that actually it's okay to change. We evolve. We change. We learn. You know, and, and it's okay. We don't need to stick to how it was. You know, evolution is actually really, very empowering and it's, it shows strength to be able to correct things.

Emma: I couldn't agree more. I think, you know, it shows real conviction in wanting to do this in the right way. And you know, I think, you know, like I said, to depart from something that's so successful because, you know, ultimately, and I know that you'll know this, disabled people are often erased, or not counted, or ignored, or whatever term you want to use. And so I think when the story was potentially being created and then all of the adaptations of it, you know, even the original Broadway production, I mean, to deviate from something and to take into account the community that was being offended and upset and you know, not feeling represented in a story that I think is, I mean, it couldn't be more about identity if it tried.

Chantelle: Yeah.

Emma: You know, *Wicked* is about authenticity. It's about, you know, internal conflict and you know, all of these really beautiful things that it seems like it would be such a disservice to be then counting out a group that they're representing in this story, but not representing in that authentic way. And I'm curious in terms of what you think this could do for the entertainment industry going forward. Because you've shown, between you and Marissa and all of the other amazing people part of this project, that this can be done and it can be done sensitively, it can be done cost effectively, you know, all of these things. What is it that you are hoping it will mean?

Chantelle: I mean there is a movement happening. There are accessibility coordinators. Having been trained, been working in this field for a long time, I just seem to manage to crash into an enormous, powerful platform for it. And I think *Wicked* has had such a huge platform that it's done wonders for access within the industry. And also with it, like I was saying, Marissa is a perfect front person because she is able to vocalize on this, as well. And people are interested to listen to her, to watch her. And I think it's really instigate. It's the catalyst of a huge movement. And although this, the work has been going on for a long time, I think they needed something as big as *Wicked* to catapult us into the spotlight for people to go, hang on, yeah, this needs to happen.

And I think also it's really important to say that although access coordinate— Well myself, I can't speak for others. But I know as an access coordinator on *Wicked*, I was brought in for Marissa and for Cecily who played younger Nessarose, but it was much bigger than that. Because there is disability in all areas. There are people in production, there, that, you know, you need an access coordinator on set. Not only if there is a cast member who has a disability. But you know somebody in hair and makeup might have a chronic illness and she has access needs. It doesn't mean that she's not capable of performing at the top of her game. It just means she may have access knees or there may be a guy who is neurodivergent, who works in props, and they just maybe need something to just make— You know, there is a lot of consideration. It's not just a tunnel vision. We have an actor and they need specific, you know, they need a sign language interpreter.

Actually in society you don't go out of the house and you only see one type of person. You know, movies have to represent society and when you go out, you'll see people of all cultures, of all physical appearance, and of disability and non-disabled. And you, you know, this needs to be represented in all industries. And it is. But unfortunately we have to kind of say it for people to go, oh, yeah.

Emma: Yeah.

Chantelle: And I think that's now become more noticed.

Emma: That's certainly what I, you know, was hoping for. I think what was so unfortunate about the first film, and I think you know this is specifically in terms of the really unnecessary hate that got targeted Marissa's way. In terms of people being critical of,

I think they were really conflating the character of Nessa, who is not meant to be, you know, this perfect person who does everything right. You know, she is a messy character and that is just as authentic, you know, to disabled people. But I think... And, and Marissa has spoken about this far better than I can summarize. But I know that people were really conflating the character of Nessa and not liking Nessa because she's a whiner or you know, she's selfish or whatever, you know, the character flaws are, and mixing that with disability. And sort of like using the disability as a way in to criticize.

And I think it was so disappointing for me as a disabled person who, again, had the honor of interviewing Marissa and seeing how amazing she is, and then seeing the film very soon after it came out, and being really excited as a disabled person for this authentic representation. And then seeing the hate that was sort of directed at disability, but then, you know, mixing it with the character. And just in ways that I don't personally think other actors really experience in the same way. I don't know if you have any sort of thoughts on the fallout that happened from the first film.

Chantelle: Um, yeah. It was, it was horrid. It was horrid to watch that unravel. But I, I fear, uh, tragically, there are people out there who want to do that. There are people out there who want to, to spread negativity. And I think all groups have experienced this. Whether it's homophobia or transphobia or racism or I think, you know, there are people out there ready to strip people apart and blame it on whatever it is that they see as not being their privilege. And yeah, it is tragic. But I think Marissa dealt with it really beautifully. And I think it is just a demonstration of that very, very small minority of society. Your voice isn't loud enough to actually make an impact. So you go away. You do you. And we'll carry on. We'll carry on dancing.

Emma: I completely agree. I don't think that it has taken the spotlight or anything from this really incredible representation and, you know, in this world that is receiving so many eyes, so much attention. And you know, I think with Wicked as well, you know, it wasn't limited to just Nessarose, but you know, in

Oz when Elphaba and Glinda are sort of, you know, doing the "Just One Day in the Emerald City" you know, there are people in the crowd in the Emerald City, I noticed another wheelchair user. And so it was just all of this built in to just normal in this world that's being created and just how wonderful that was.

And I'm curious, in terms of access coordinators, do you feel that there are opportunities, I suppose, for more access coordinators? For, like you say, those people who are behind the scenes of which there are tons and tons of people behind the scenes. And like we've talked about, you know, if one in four roughly people have a disability, then that's a lot of disabled people working on this film. Do you think that access coordinators will be brought in for those behind the scenes people as well?

Chantelle: I really hope so. I really do. And I think the network of access coordinators are working really hard. Really hard on all productions of all sizes. And I think it's, like we said before, it's become more noticeable now. I think people at more production companies are thinking. And I think it's also, it's quite current now as well. Because Wicked has made it current. And I think that helps. That really helps. But yes, it was a really diverse cast and that really excited me from day one with it. Because, you know, the dancers were all ages and sizes and I loved, I loved how it was so integrated. It was so beautifully representing the perfect world.

Emma: Yeah.

Chantelle: Because that's, yeah. And everything was accessible for everyone. And to be part of that was a real honor. And I just, I really do hope that, things just keep progressing and moving forward. I think they will. I hope they will. And I will keep shouting. Until, I can't shout anymore.

Emma: And I mean, on the day that we're recording this, I mean, Jonathan Bailey has just been announced sexiest man alive. So, you know, talk about the beautiful world of Oz.

Chantelle: Yeah.

Emma: The incredible Jonathan Bailey. I actually saw him in, um, a play earlier this year in London, and I didn't realize that there would be a point where he sort of goes onto the, the balcony, um, where the disabled seats were. And so my mother was two seats away from Jonathan Bailey. She said, I could see the sweat on his face. It was all very exciting for both of us. Um, but in terms of what's next for you, what, what is next in terms of the work that you do?

Chantelle: I've been the access coordinator on organizing the premier coming up for Wicked. Which was lovely. So that they, you know, not only has the movie incorporated an access coordinator, but the premier of the movie is using access coordinators. So that's been fabulous to be part of that, to make sure that everything is covered. Um, and I, I felt really empowered locally to get involved in stuff. I am on numerous committees for making things better for other people. So for me it's just about advocating.

Something as big as Wicked was quite exhausting. But it was really energizing at the same time. Um, but yeah, I feel like locally is my place now. And I, I want my community. I'm really reaching out to my community and I'm really feeling how important that is to me, like I was saying. So, for me, next is probably some really warm, fluffy pajamas 'cause it's so damn cold here.

Emma: I know it's cold, it's dark at like 4:00 PM now.

Chantelle: Yeah.

Emma: But no, I think that that's, it's so exciting. And I think, you know, the success of the franchise and the success of, you know, people talking about Nessa and the way that the film has been done, both behind and in front of the camera, I mean, it's so wonderful and it's so, it's so huge. Like you said, it's, it's this huge platform. And I, I really love actually that, you know, you weren't super aware of Wicked beforehand. I mean, like you said, the theater where it's on in London, I also tried to go and found out that the lift wasn't going to be big enough for my particular electric chair. And then I, I grew up in the States and I got taken to see Wicked at one point, but that must have been some like product that was used on cleaning the theater, I had an asthma attack partway through the first act and I had to leave. So I didn't actually get to see it properly until the film.

And I think it's just been, it's such a beautiful story. And it's such a wonderful thing to see inclusion and accessibility really be at the heart of. And that's, you know, I'm so excited that we finally got to have this conversation. Because you know, like you said, Marissa is doing incredible stuff in front of the camera, but I know that you made so much of that possible. So, yeah, I'm so incredibly pleased that you agreed to, to come on. So I just wanna say a, a huge, huge thank you, um, for, for your time.

Chantelle: Thank you so much for asking me. It's been an honor and it's been a real pleasure chatting with you. Thank you.

Emma: Thank you so much for listening to this episode of The Wheelchair Activist. If you want to stay up to date and catch all of our previous episodes, you can find them all on my website, [The Wheelchair Activist.com](http://TheWheelchairActivist.com). You can also follow me on social media at [Emma.Vogelmann](https://www.instagram.com/Emma.Vogelmann) on most platforms. And if you'd like to support the podcast, our links to the GoFundMe and BuyMeACoffee are in this episode description. And I'm so excited to bring you another episode next month. See you then.