

'AUDIO ONLY' PODCAST

Mia 00:03

Before we start this episode, we'll mention topics related to sexual assault and trauma. If you need support, you can find information about where to turn for help. I consent comes first at Toronto metropolitan university. You want to start off testing. Hello, one, two, testing. How's it sounding? When we get my ex which is shy test, you want to do an automatic like, oh my words. I have a friend with everything I have to say like it doesn't. Yeah, it all sounds a little more serious. Yeah, we're ready to go. Are we rolling? And rolling in three, two?

Mari 00:40

Hi, I'm Mariana Schuetze

Mia 00:42

And I'm Mia Johnson.

Mari 00:43

This is a podcast about podcasts.

Mia 00:45

Yes, Mari. We're getting up close and personal with you. But on an audio level.

Mari 00:51

We're what one or 2 million podcasts today?

Mia 00:53

Podcasts are everywhere. Most of them are current events, gossip advice. They're mostly based in the real world. How do you take real stories and put them through a fictional lens? What's that world like?

Mari 01:05

Wait, is this really a podcast about a podcast? This is Audio Only a Podcast where we explore audio narratives, and how fictional truths can get a larger truth than nonfiction. And the first project we're looking at is a fictional audio narrative, kind of like theater. This one really intrigued me.

Mia 01:22

I've done theater for all of my life. Since I was a little kid. I fell in love with the art of storytelling and performing performance art is so intimate and special. Anytime I walk away from a show, I'm left with this all this new sensibility and awareness and with the audio format that is accessible to me in a completely different way. I mean, I can access it when I'm on my way to the subway, or when I'm going to get a little coffee. Yeah, to be honest, I have you ever come across a fictional podcast before. Most podcasts nowadays are based on reality, meaning they're usually about real life events, news advice, the podcasts that I usually listen to the ones where they rewatch shows, and they invite the character directors or the actors to talk about the episodes. But today's podcast

epiphany is different. It's an idea narrative based on a fictional script. And that's what caught our attention. Yeah, you were the one that came to me. You were like Mia, you have to check out this podcast. I mean, it's like a podcast, but not in the traditional way.

Mari 02:18

I was also very intrigued by the format. I love telling stories. And this is a very different way of telling one, so I wanted to learn more about it. And one of our friends Munna knows one of the writers. And I just thought that we had to talk to Haley Thompson, the Creator. She's a fourth year media production student here at CMU. And epiphany started out as a final year project. It's a podcast, but it's a fictional story. We sat down with Haley to see how all this came to be what the process was, like, from the very beginning to post production, which is where the team is at now, what's really cool is that it actually started out as a one woman play. That's such a bold idea for a school assignment, like who comes up with that? Haley told us all about this,

Haylee 02:55

I definitely think it's the best way to tell it. Because we've curated the whole script around the audio format, I started coming out this project. Personally, it was going to be a personal thing from a one woman play perspective, which is like I tell people, isn't it? They're like, What a weird way to start it off. And I was like, I know. And I do you think that in any medium that you use, you can have a lot of different responses to something. And it definitely would have looked entirely different if the script had continued in its original vision.

Mari 03:28

Yeah. And that's what's so cool about this, you can tell the same story in different formats, via television film, a book, or a fictional podcast. And each time you ended up with a different product,

Mia 03:37

who knows what that one woman play would have looked like?

Haylee 03:40

Yeah, I feel like the format it is in now is best suited for audio. You could not take this script and do a one woman play with it. But that's not the point. Because we've we've moved away from that. That was my crazy initial idea, which turned into epiphany.

Mia 03:54

This is a coming of age narrative at its core, and all its episodes centered around its main character, Jamie.

Haylee 04:00

It's about Jamie, an 18 year old she's moving away from her home in Victoria BC. She's moving to the big city of Toronto for the first time. But she has a lot of personal trauma that she hasn't confronted. And it's kind of explores the manifestation of how trauma can affect you in ways that you don't think it will.

Mari 04:21

Epiphany deals with sexual assault by putting the character's healing journey at the forefront of the narrative, meaning the podcast doesn't focus on the traumatic event itself, but instead on how Jamie's life who has been affected by this trauma and how she's moving past it.

Mia 04:34

Haley said this was crucial in the creation process. She talked about how epiphany differentiates from other fictional works where characters live through sexual violence and gender based violence.

Haylee 04:45

Most of them use the the assault as the, like climax of the story, which we didn't like we wanted it to be about this journey and recognize that it's a really hard struggle for survivors. Um, But to show that it is possible and it is something that you can do in there is help out there. So that's kind of the main message of the story, a lot of nuance to it, there's layers.

Mari 05:13

You know, I have so much respect for people who make podcasts every week. Because as we learned during this, making up podcasts is very hard. And Haley told us that she was only able to pull off her idea because of her amazing team of collaborators, like Addison, who we also interviewed for a podcast.

Mia 05:27

Addison Holley is the director of epiphany. But she's also an actor. She's been acting since she was seven years old. She's worked in animation as a voice actor, and has been very keen on directing.

Addison 05:38

So epiphany, when I read, Haley originally pitched the concept for epiphany back in project development in third year, and when I read it, I was immediately drawn to it. And when she was looking for a director, I thought I could bring my voice, voiceover work history, and to the project, and hopefully, be a great director for it. And that's kind of how I joined. I listen to so the potential of all the Haley story could be and so when I was going through the list of pitches, when I read Halley's, it really kind of the storyline it's a, an important and and beautiful storyline. And so that really drew me and just the way Haley described it and went about, I could just tell that she was a passionate and that it was going to be a really beautiful, beautifully written story,

Mari 06:38

as a writer, like, how different is it to write for, like these audio narrative instead of like a play, or something else that we've written before?

Haylee 06:46

Writing for the year is something very different. You've got to like, check yourself every step of the way. Obviously, you're in a theater, there's one person performing a bunch of roles, you kind of get it, they can embody it physically. But through just hearing it, that's a lot harder. So then we we transitioned it. So it was like a multi actor story.

Mia 07:08

Going to a theater is a very different experience than listening to a podcast. But they can both be very personal. With her background in theater, Haley told us, it's all about intimacy. And that is exactly what the other format captures, and why they chose this as their medium.

Haylee 07:23

They feel like it's such an intimate form. And I really, really liked that. That was something I'd never really considered prior. And then kind of delving more into it. I was like, wow, this is so personal, because you are kind of envisioning everything. But you get the wonderful experience of being guided by the story, which I think is super cool. And it's kind of why I built the podcast idea off of that.

Mia 07:50

Yeah, I love how easy it is for anyone listening to a podcast to be able to envision themselves in the story. That's kind of how I felt listening to the bits of Epiphany, we had access to take a listen now to the teaser trailer epiphany put out, I finally figured out a pattern to put those chords and

Epiphany Trailer 08:09

it sounds pretty good. Actually. I even wrote myself some lyrics to go with it.

Mari 08:19

For this episode to help us understand a bit more about telling stories in an audio only format. We reached out to Chris Tolly, a veteran in podcasting,

Chris 08:27

the storytelling is just so immediate, very different format to when we record we record with people, you know, they're right up to the microphone. And the performance is completely different because you can hear their breath, you can hear when they talk their voice cracking just slightly it becomes such an intimate experience.

Mia 08:49

Chris is a writer, producer and director. He's the CO artistic director of expect Theatre in the distillery district. But a few years ago, he moved away from the stage the physical one, it's the one that exists between your ears. He's been the CO producer, along with Laura Miller of the CBC podcast play me, which turns Canadian plays into bingeable audio dramas.

Chris 09:10

You know, as you know, with podcast, most people listen with earbuds and like the sound just inches away from your brain. It's like as intimate of an experience as you could possibly get. And the people, the people the actors, I mean, are performing just for you. And it's an incredibly intimate and special experience that with

PlayME opening 09:43

this is play me your digital theater. We transformed the hottest contemporary plays into bingeable audio dramas. I'm Laura Mullin. And I'm Chris Tolley.

Chris 09:57

So I guess it was probably About six years ago, my partner at xspec theatre, Laura Mullin and myself, we were sitting back and we were, or theater artists, directors, producers, writers, and we loved the ephemeral side of theater. But that's got this great sort of excitement and electricity. But at the other end, the fact is you have to be at a certain place at a certain time to catch a show, and then it's gone. And we had been dabbling a little bit in in

audio recordings and podcasting. And we thought, well, what if we sort of merge those two ideas, so we created play me, which would take theater shows and turn them into audio dramas.

Mari 10:48

The cool thing about playing me and something that Chris talked a lot about, is that it allows them to create this fingerprint of Canada, moving outside of the Toronto centric scene, preserving stories from people from multiple cultures and backgrounds.

Chris 11:00

So the question of really balancing and capturing all the different elements of what Canada is. And, you know, that means having you know, very a lot of a lot of theater in particular is about making change as well. So means a lot of our shows have a very strong angle where they examine the things like racism, feminism, things that when you listen to these shows, hopefully people will have a different perspective and look at things in a different way. And hopefully, one or evoke change, as well. It's a glimpse into another world a different perspective, you get to see someone's life played out in front of you, that you may not encounter in your day to day.

Mari 11:57

Yeah, I feel like this is what every fictional story has the power to do. And this is one of the reasons why I really connect with them, they make me stop and look at my own experiences a lot more than nonfiction does, especially because a lot of the time, it's all made up. So I can feel like I can connect with them a lot more without the pressure of judging someone's real life experiences.

Mia 12:14

Yeah, right. When I feel more of a connection with certain characters, when I can see myself in them, they bring up these very raw emotions.

Haylee 12:22

I think one of the reasons we've kind of come back to again and again, is because it's so personal, it's very easy as a just an audience member to connect with something that you hear, because you can envision anyone in that you can put yourself in Jamie or Narrator shoes, we kind of liked that it's just a voice because then it can be anyone and anyone can relate to this story. And that's kind of the thing about sexual assault, it's happens to anyone, there's no perfect survivor. And there's no perfect trauma process, which is kind of something we wanted to highlight. And we felt this forum was something that can you can make it as personal as intimate as you want it to be i i always envision envision our listeners like I hope they get to like lie down on their bed and like have their headphones in and just experience it like that, because that's kind of the vision, we want anyone to kind of be able to sit back and put themselves into the story.

Mia 13:22

With epiphany, Haley and her team, were sure to do their research. As they were reporting on such a delicate topic, they needed to be informed.

Haylee 13:30

So we've been in communication with consent comes first, which is a fabulous organization on the team you campus. They came and spoke with our entire practicum class. And then we from there, kind of engaged talks

further, we sent them the script. And they kind of gave some pointers and feedback, which was fabulous. We worked with this wonderful person named Corey who really helped us go through everything with a fine tooth comb and make sure that we were telling survivor stories authentically and making sure we were respecting what is a really really difficult topic to approach.

Mia 14:11

Chris tells us every sound is intentional.

Mari 14:15

Well, maybe not this one.

Chris 14:18

And the thing is every choice that an actor makes you know how they say hi, when they greet somebody tells you everything about their relationship with their lovers, whether their enemies whether there is a masala between them, like just that one word high tells you everything. And it's the same with a sound effect. When somebody gets up from a chair. You can tell whether they're angry, or whether they're leaving reluctantly, or like everything can be told through that sound effect. And it's the exact same with as you build all those sound effects. How somebody puts a cup of coffee down on a table tells you the world about what they're thinking and tried, which may be the opposite of what they're saying.

Mia 15:02

These types of decisions were instrumental in the creation of epiphany. It's a true testament to how the team operates. So much thought is put into every little detail. For this episode, we were also able to talk to Drake Sanderson, Haley's co writer. And he mentioned that a lot of the sounds they're using in this story came up during the writing process,

Drake 15:20

I would say when you write it, you do have like, certain sound effects in your mind that you want to be put in. So then you just type it in, and then you think, oh, yeah, this would be good for when Jamie walks in, and then there can be a door sound effect on the right, and then maybe her beds over on the left, and she walks over and plops down on the bed, you can hear that in your speakers or in your headset.

Mari 15:44

Addison's experience as a voice actor also came in as a huge aid, when she was directing and thinking about what sounds to include in the narrative.

Mia 15:51

I was really interested to hear the physicality that goes into the voice work. I mean, they're so active, they really have to overcompensate for that loss of visuals.

Addison 15:59

This is what I like to do in the booth, when I'm recording as a voice actor, is to be like very physical with your body, rather than just like sitting there and just like saying, like, oh, they went over there, whatever line it may be, to really like, get into it. So we had Emily, our lead actress playing Jamie, and narrating epiphany. If it was a more

intense scene or more physical scene, we'd have her stand up and really get involved with the movement. And I think that is something that you can really hear. Just, if you're listening to audio, when someone's actually moving, you hear that in the vocal tone, rather than just like obviously sitting or if you're running like, although you can't actually physically run in a recording studio. Even just like movement of running like your arms, whether I'm like I'll give a little example like, or like, you can like kind of hear that difference. So yeah, things like that were really important.

Mia 16:58

Even with all these added qualities, sounds, music accessibility, there are still some things the audio format cannot capture.

Chris 17:07

I think the thing and I don't think you can really replicate it now but you did in the past, is a collective experience of being in a room and try to like fight back tears, and knowing that you're surrounded by other people who are trying to do that, too. And, you know, it used to be like when you think about radio dramas in the past, you know, people would sit around their radio together before television, they would sit around, and they would listen as a family to shows and they would all laugh together and they would cry together. And you had that collective experience. With podcasting, it's great, because you can listen, anytime, anywhere, you can be on a treadmill, you can be walking down Queen Street, like you can be, you know, you know, you can be experienced different worlds, no matter what you're doing. But the downside is, of course, you lose that collective experience. So I think that's what I wish I could capture and sell in a bottle. Or if not sell in a bottle, stream it.

Mari 18:20

Will do that! Will listen to that together

Mia 18:25

I really agree with Chris here. I don't think this is a feeling that can be totally replicated. I mean, from what I remember, when I used to be in high school, we would do shows like this, at the high emotional points in rehearsals or during the actual shows we'd have to hold the space for whoever was singing or whatever the the moment may be. And when you were holding the space in the moment you were thinking about your how you relate to whatever was going on whatever they were talking about. You were thinking about it, you were feeling it. And everyone in the audience brings their own personal experience to that space. And everyone's just sitting there and basking in the room is like vibrating with that energy. It's really special.

Mari 19:08

Yeah, I haven't done theater. But as an audience member, I totally relate with this experience. You definitely feel some sort of magic when you're just sitting there with everyone sharing this experience. So I'm definitely excited to listen to epiphany and see what the experience is going to be like. Haley mentioned, you're planning on putting it out, but January or something. What are your plans? Yeah. Okay, that's coming back.

Addison 19:29

Yeah. So what's coming next is you can follow our Instagram at Tmu epiphany. So we will be posting all updates on there. It will eventually the final product will be on our website, as well as we are looking into Spotify and

Apple podcast right now. So it'll be on streaming platforms to listen as well. So that's where you can find us so excited

Mia 19:57

Yes, we can't wait to hear it. We're really thanks forListening yay

Mari 20:03

okay good that was good okay and see you next time

Mia 20:08

this episode was produced by Mariana Schuetze and Mia Johnson