

"What's Off?"

S1E6

Rebecca KellyG // Harmonizing with the Self

Transcript

Rebecca KellyG:

But there is a distinction between discomfort and danger. And the more we practice that change, the more we grow. So, for the good of ourselves, and the good of our collective, we want to move into celebrating wading in the waters of our own discomfort. Because you cannot teach what you do not know, and people struggle to be what they cannot see. So, if you want to make change in society, it has to start within.

(Music)

Nicky Maggio:

Welcome to "What's Off?", the podcast where we shine the spotlight on Off-Broadway innovation. Each episode features interviews with trailblazing artists, administrators, service providers, and other theater workers in the Off, and Off Off-Broadway community. I'm your host, Nicky Maggio.

Ashley J. Hicks:

And I'm your other host, Ashley J. Hicks, A.K.A. Ash. At the top of the episode, we played an excerpt of a soundscape created and performed by our guest, Rebecca KellyG. Rebecca has synthesized her background as a performer and a civil rights attorney to help other individuals, and organizations bring their full selves to their work. She's an equity consultant who's particularly invested in working with people of color to shed their internalized racial oppression, as well as shift organizational culture away from white supremacy.

Her work is really all about caring for the people who make up arts organizations. In addition to facilitating organizational and BIPOC focused retreats, Rebecca is a sound artist and speaker. In a unique blend of public speaking and performance, she weaves vocal harmonies with percussive sounds to create meditative soundscapes, accompanied by storytelling and affirmations.

Nicky Maggio:

Interviewing Rebecca is our very own co-executive director, Risa Shoup. Earlier this season, Risa conducted interviews for our special episode, The Caregivers // Bringing Our Whole Selves. Rebecca KellyG was originally scheduled to be included in that

episode, but we were so taken away by her story that we wanted to shine a special spotlight on her.

Ashley J. Hicks:

So let's get into it. And listeners, make sure to stick around for a post-interview discussion with Risa, Nicky, and myself, as well as an extended soundscape journey with Rebecca KellyG. Enjoy.

(Music)

Risa Shoup:

Talking with Rebecca was thrilling. After we reviewed my interview with Rebecca, it became crystal clear to us that what Rebecca noticed was off had to do with her experience as a person working within some highly professionalized systems. The legal system, theatrical productions and institutions, the education system and more. All of these systems thrive, or are challenged by people who contain far more than what is demanded of them by a job description.

As a manager, I am confident that my employees are the most productive and creative when they feel their whole selves are welcome and supported at work. It was affirming, and motivating to discuss this, as it relates to the theater industry, with Rebecca. The theater industry is working through a lot of very destabilizing challenges right now, so it's mission-critical that we support our staff members as full people, so they can bring the best, most creative solutions to the table. We begin by hearing about Rebecca's artistic practice, her artist self being one of her most inspiring roles. So yeah, I am going to jump in. Question one.

Rebecca KellyG:

Okay.

Risa Shoup:

How do you name and describe your artistic process?

Rebecca KellyG:

I create vocal soundscapes, and they are informed by various experiences I've had creating more space internally, and learning how to move intentionally. Well, straight up to describe it, when I make soundscapes, what I do is it will be either I just had an experience, or something will just come to me, a particular sound will come to me. So,

that came to me once while I was changing my daughter's diaper, and I was like, "Ooh, there's something in that for me."

And so I'll start it, and then I'll just wait and see internally if I hear, really, it's like feel into another sound that compliments that one. And I was going through some things and I thought, "Oh, let me just make some sounds about it." And I started making them, and what was done, I thought, "I like that, I like that." And I feel like it communicates a feeling that I was having, and it was grief at that time, and it was like, "Oh, this sounds like that." But it sounds like grief that's layered with hope in it, and that felt important to me.

And because the sounds were so helpful to me, once I would make them, I thought, "Oh, let me bring them to other places." So then when I would do workshops, or engage with other people, I would start with that. And I think, as I'm saying it, I have this kind of belief that if I'm playing for you, anyone who's listening, pieces of my healing process that I've discerned are to be shared, I think it has the potential to speak to a part of you that also is longing, and wishing for your authenticity, for your creativity, and brings you present into the now, so that now whatever it is we're going to talk about, whatever difficult thing we're going to talk about, you have a little more space to talk about it, and I have a little more space to really listen, and be present enough to know, "Oh, we should go in this direction, or not that direction," or, "Oh, this person has something to say." Just more openness. More spaciousness and more connection for all of us when we listen to something like that, and then we do our work together.

And that's actually been really echoed for me. I've been reading Resmaa Menakem's book, *My Grandmother's Hands*, and in that he talks about some ways to build community and connection, and one of them is singing, clapping. I said one, but I'm listening many, singing, clapping, breathing, humming. And that just felt like an affirmation, like, "Yeah." I feel inside that I knew that, and I've practiced that.

So, it's always nice to see the things backed by research, which is also why... It's not always needed, but it is nice, and it feels affirming to me, and it's why, also when I do work with spaces, I try to speak to the different ways that we all learn, and experience things. So, we're not just going to do sounds. We're not just going to look at data. We're not just going to make plays together. We're going to do all of those things. We're going to be able to read things, we're going to engage in an interactive activity, just the different ways that people work. So, that's how I use my sounds, what I name them. I think I'll leave that for other people. People can tell me what they would name the experience that they had. I don't really have a name for it, other than vocal soundscapes.

Risa Shoup:

And can you talk to us a little more about your workshops, what you do with people?

Rebecca KellyG:

So my work has evolved in many ways over time, on learning oppressive, conditioned beliefs, and creating more space for trust in ourselves, and in what people can do together when we're all actively trying to listen to ourselves, and trust in ourselves, and in one another. Because I think the more you trust in yourself, the more you can trust in other people.

Practically speaking, that began as me doing anti-racism work and anti-racism workshops. And to me, there's a lot of different factors in that, because again, being anti-racist, there's things to do, but there's a lot of internal work that needs to happen. And actually I'll say it by going like this. So, we're thinking about the facets of oppression and the facets of racism.

There's internalized racism, the way I think about myself. There's interpersonal, so the way that I think about and interact with other people, that's informed by the way I think about myself. Institutional, the way that those ideas I just mentioned about myself and other people, the way those manifest into policies and practices, and then structural, the way that multiple institutions holding that same ideology support those oppressive practices with one another, kind of enshrining them for generations.

My workshops, I try to focus as much as I can, and at least touch on a level of understanding of all of those, but currently what I'm really excited about, and turning a lot of my attention to is supporting wellness practices. But wellness, I'm shrinking, because when I say wellness, I think it can sometimes be really focused on self, and I don't mean that. I mean the wellness as in ridding yourself of internalized oppression so that you can be well, because I see that as an illness that we're holding inside.

So, that's something I am very invested in. I'm particularly invested in that for people of color, to unlearn the ways that we might feel less than towards ourselves, or towards each other, so that we can just internally rise, collectively rise, which is happening, and tapping into ourselves and our power. So, I'm very invested in that. One of the ways I do that is through Room to Breathe, which is a retreat, a virtual retreat, and in-person retreat for people of color. And sometimes it's people of color at predominantly white institutions. Sometimes it's other people of color, and there are going to be other Room to Breathe, actually, that are focused on just deconstructing constructs.

So, creating the space, then getting a new perspective and saying, "Well, how do you see it now that you've had a chance to breathe, now that you've had a chance to lay down, what do you feel now about your connection to that construct?" Oh, and I have to also mention then I have a practice called Ceremony. It's an interactive sound experience for people to let go of internalized oppression and make space for abundance, and that's only a soundscape. So that's me guiding people through soundscapes with some guided movement that's voluntary, but that's something I'm

doing more in person. And there's one that's specifically for people of color, and then there's the other that is for everyone.

Risa Shoup:

You have also worked as a civil rights attorney, is that correct?

Rebecca KellyG:

Yes.

Risa Shoup:

How has that work as a civil rights attorney affected, or informed your practice of care, especially for artists and theater workers?

Rebecca KellyG:

There's so many things that come up with this question for me, because... I'm going to just tell you this tale, I think, because I started off in musical theater, and as an actor, I was a little theater kid, always doing the musicals. This is me, this is all singing, dancing, acting, I'm about it. And that was what I focused on in college also, and I started auditioning and everything. But on that journey of learning, there were many things that would arise. There was just a call within me to be involved in social change, in wanting to push back on things that were occurring, that I saw to be a problem.

I was a teenager during the Bush era. Growing up during that time, there were just so many things socially, politically that I've wanted to shift, and be a part of changing, but I didn't know how to do that. I was young, and not that you couldn't know, there were plenty of young people who see the vision, and activate on it. But for me, at that time, I was not entirely sure how I wanted to go about getting involved in change, and being so focused on theater and arts, and that being also something that brought me so much joy, and openness when I was performing a strong sense of belonging, but when I was in class, or noticing, "What are these productions, or what am I learning?" There was a lot of communication about who and what I could be as a young black girl.

There was a lot of culture, white dominant culture of, "Here are the ideas of who you are, and how you're supposed to be, and here's the ideas of how everyone else."

There's all these categories of how everyone is supposed to be.

But for me, that was really weighing on me, and I felt like there was this request, or demand that if I wanted to be successful in this, I was going to need to learn how to impersonate the stereotype that white supremacy culture had of me. And I wasn't interested in that. I wasn't interested in that, and it brought up a lot of tension for me. And when I say I wasn't interested in that, I say it now with, "I wasn't interested in that," with kind of like a... People can't see me, but a toss of the hand. But then it was difficult.

It felt like a really strong tension, because I loved the arts, and performing so much, but they felt like, "Oh, I have to choose whether I can be myself, or engage in any kind of social change work, or be an artist."

And so, that's the binary choice I felt then, and so it seemed like, "Okay, well then I'm going to go engage in social change, because I don't want to minimize myself, and I don't want to have to impersonate some version of myself that isn't true to me." So, I'm saying all this to say, "Yes, I'm a civil rights attorney, and these are the things that came before that." So that's where I was before that, and I decided to start exploring what it looked like to be more involved in social change.

And what I felt at the times is very indicative of my personality probably. But I was like, "Well, I feel like I focused on theater and that's where my energy has been, and I don't know as much, just the way that I had approached things about how our structures of government worked, or how were the laws and things that were being put in place, how did they get there? How do you get them gone?" I just didn't know. And so I thought, "If I go to law school, I'll have a really strong sense of how things are, and then I'll know more clearly how to dismantle them." That was the thought that I had at the time.

So I went into law school with that mentality, and I focused on civil rights. And actually, what I felt in my time there was, "Okay, I want to look at what's going on within education, because that feels like one of our major dividing points." And went to Washington, DC, did work on the school to prison pipeline, which are policies and practices that push students of color from the classroom, and into the justice... No, the legal system. We'll talk about programming, because that's what I was taught, the justice system. So, that just pops out of my mouth, but I have to be present, there is nothing just about the system. It's the legal system. That's what it is. But this is not a just system. It's just the system based on laws that we live within right now. But, what I found in that space, getting to your... I promise I'm getting to the answer to your question.

Risa Shoup:

No apologies. No apologies.

Rebecca KellyG:

What I found in that space was, I went in there like, "These are about to be my people. These are the rabble rousers. This is going to be the most radical space, and we're all going to be about change." And when I got into that space, I found that there were just a lot of ways I saw oppression operating. Yeah. And just ideas about who... Again, who and what people were supposed to do, how were they supposed to show up at work, in the workspace, and what we were supposed to advocate for, and what fell under the umbrella of civil rights, and what didn't, and how to operate in that space.

One thing that happened to me while I was there, was so I mentioned I was doing school to prison pipeline work. So I went to Chicago, and I connected with students and teachers, and this is where I first learned about restorative justice practices, restorative justice practitioners. And I connected with someone else who could do record expungement to support young people in that, all to say, I saw this as a really holistic thing, like how do we start getting to the root of what's going on here, and give resources and tools to the people here, to move forward, and get rid of these policies that are a problem?

So I was talking to my boss at the time, and explaining, "Here's who I've been talking to, and here's what we're thinking about. And here's..." And she said, "You know, Rebecca, you're a lawyer, not a peacemaker." For y'all who can't see me, I'm looking around. Like, to me... And I felt really hurt by that, but it's actually, it's helpful to me. It's helpful. It gave me a sense of my own orientation, like how am I looking at this?

Because for me, it's like, I know I'm a lawyer, but I'm here advocating towards peace. That's the goal here, is towards peace. That's why, I mean, at least for me, that's why I do this. So, I'm painting all of that to say there is a lot of amazing work done by civil rights advocates, and attorneys, and people, movement lawyers all over. So, I'm not trying to paint a picture of like, "It's terrible there, and the work isn't getting done." The work is getting done by incredible people, and we all have to find the place that is most true to us, and our own expression. And so I had this desire, but it just wasn't the space for me.

And that wasn't the only thing, but that was something that gave the environment more clarity for me, and when I was thinking about leaving, I thought, "I want to..." I see, if you think of things as a big barrel, and there's a faucet, and the problem is dripping out of the sides of the barrel, or the problem is coming out of the faucet in the front of the barrel, I felt like I don't want to patch up the sides. I want to just go turn off that faucet. That's what I would like to do. And that was what brought me to civil rights work originally, because it's more of a structural overall change of a policy or a practice. So that's what drew me to that. It's all needed, but that's what drew me there.

But it's the same thing that kind of drew me out, because while I was engaging in that work, I was just seeing, especially when I did the work with people in Chicago, this is actually very much a people issue. As I was saying before, organizations, institutions are made up of people, can't just be a policy or a practice. We need to be talking about people, and what's happening internally. And I don't necessarily mean we need to be focusing on white people accepting people of color. I just mean we need to be looking inside people of color, reactivating our knowledge of who we are, and what can we do together to rise up, and white people looking at, "How have I been conditioned? What's happening for me?"

So that wasn't happening through civil rights litigation. Okay? So that's what I was interested in, and that wasn't where that was going to happen. So, I redirected my energy to different spaces. I was still in the education sphere, so for a while I taught at American University, Washington College of Law, and I supported law students in teaching public speaking, constitutional law, know your rights kind of thing for high school students, which was something I did when I was in law school as well.

So, I was doing that, and that was closer for me, of people, and getting into the people work. But I still felt, because I am an artist at my core, I felt a really deep loss for me that I wasn't integrating that. And I was in a way, there were things that I would incorporate into the classroom, and ways we would end the year, and stuff that were very much in the art space, and fun, and singing, and arts, and all of this. But it wasn't feeling enough for me. I was feeling a really big gap in my own expression.

So, came back to New York City, did work in the arts activist space, and as I started doing that at particular different varying organizations, I noticed, again, when I entered, I'm like, "Okay, now I'm with my people, because these are the artists, these are the activists. They understand the intersection of creativity, of change, of all of this." And that is true.

And I started noticing a lot of the behaviors and patterns that I was seeing in the office culture were exactly the same. Not even like, "Oh yeah, but there..." It's exactly the same, but maybe there's poetry at the beginning or something like that, but the policies were the same. So that's when I started understanding this to be a pattern. I've been using white supremacy culture, and these things now because I have an understanding of what those things are now. I'd started to develop my own way of communicating with other people about social change, about policies and practices, and all of this.

And so I started creating my own practice and work of working with artists in social change spaces on how to engage in deep self-reflection individually, organizationally, and start taking steps forward, or start moving forward in a new way. So I was kind of doing that, and working in arts activist spaces, and also kind of building my own practice.

And then, at a point, when I started really seeing these consistent similarities, I went on to do that full time. I committed to myself, and started working with places, because in particular, the social justice space, and the artist space, at that time, this is not true now, but at that time, were a little more resistant to having conversations about ways that they might be perpetuating oppression, or contributing to all the things that they were advocating against. I felt like, "This is a space that needs it, and these are the places I'm familiar with. I know about social justice work. I understand about working as an artist, and working as an artist for social change. I understand these communities, and I understand what's happening here, and so I think that I'm equipped to support it."

And so I created a practice that really fused in device theater, music, information, research, with my ability to facilitate, to support people on that self-reflection, and moving forward journey, and what you can do to move forward. I'm supporting spaces in unlearning the things that have pushed you away potentially from your deepest self, from your humanity, from knowing how to connect with another person, or to even remember, when we're in a workspace, that you are still in community with other people. These are just other people that you know, and you're doing something together. You're all working together towards some type of North Star, whatever that may be. And anything that we have inside that says, "This is what it means to do that professionally," or, "This is what it means to do that correctly," is kind of a learning. And so I see myself as supporting people in unlearning the ideas that you have to be different than who you are, or how you are.

Risa Shoup:

Do you also find that in supporting people to unlearning that they somehow have to be different, in order to do whatever is being asked of them at work, et cetera, do you also find that the people with whom you're working reflect that they found more creativity, more capacity, a deeper understanding of something by being their whole selves?

Rebecca KellyG:

So yes, and so, yeah. Yes, and I think what I find is people do have more space, but the creation of space inside, and accessing creativity, re-accessing our creativity takes a lot of work, actually. So, I think it can feel like, "Oh, I want to make a change." I think this is true personally. It's in my experience, and what I see organizationally, it's like, "Oh, I want to change and create more space," or, "I want to be more creative," or, "I want to embrace conflict," or, "I want to slow down," so let's do that.

It takes a lot of time, because the ways... Going back to us all being people, organizations, institutions, those are all made up of individual human beings, and then those people are making policies, or breaking policies, and engaging in particular ways. And all of those people come from their own specific areas of life, their own socialization, their own hometown, their own family, their own whatever forms of education they've had throughout their lives, and all of those inform the way that you might do something.

And I'm saying all that to say, so if you want to change, many times there's a lot of little doors, and keys that have to get turned to make the kind of change that you want, accessing your creativity, or spaciousness, or slowing down. I feel like that's a big part of conversation, which I love right now, is slowing down, but getting out of a sense of urgency, and rush, like we were just talking about in the soundscape, it is radical, it's revolutionary, and it really takes a sense of trust that your worth isn't tied to your

productivity, or your pace, that you can, as a person or as an organization, produce less, and still survive.

So, getting back to this question, do I find that? I find that when I'm working with spaces, I'm supporting the individuals within those spaces, to see where there are opportunities to build in more creativity, to build in more freedom, or to see where there are limitations, and restrictions, and then I'm offering some tools of, "Here's ways that you could... You see that little space that you just found through our time together? Here's some things you could do to make that space even wider." So that's how I see that work. Yeah.

Risa Shoup:

You talked about a couple of ways that you've seen facets of the industry change over time. I really appreciate this thing that you said about how you're seeing the social justice worlds, and the arts worlds coming closer together. That is something I have seen. I feel like that I align with that, so I'm saying. Tell us how you see organizations caring for their people.

Rebecca KellyG:

I do want to talk about that. I also, as you were talking, just wanted to uplift though, the ways that individual artists and people have been demanding that they deserve care.

Risa Shoup:

Yes.

Rebecca KellyG:

It's not a shift in the wind. It's like an uprising of the people, and there are so many people who have come together to do that. So, I just want to... And continue, have always, and continue to do that. So, how do I see organizations caring for their people? So when you ask me that, I think what I'm hearing you ask me is how are leaders within organizations changing the way that policies are laid out, and the ways that they show up, that creates more of an environment of care?

Risa Shoup:

That is absolutely part of it, and I am intentionally trying to poke at the experience of individuals within an institution.

Rebecca KellyG:

Okay, yeah. Well, I'll say this then. What I see happening is the idea of care is coming into institutions and organizations in a way that I did not experience, or see that

happening, both personally when I've been within institutions, and as I've been consulting with them, within people, within institutions. So, I think there was, I was saying pattern of dehumanization, and lack of care for individuals who are working, and having gone to school for theater, again, there's this whole idea of you should not expect to be cared for. You should know you're replaceable. That's kind of the energy. You should know that you're replaceable. You should know that your value is only what you can do. And it's almost like you're supposed to internalize that as a badge of honor. And all of that to say though, I'm seeing the emphasis on care and humanity beginning to come in. That's what I was saying, just the idea of care taking, that we are all human beings working towards something together. That's what's happening here. Be it a production, or an appellate argument in the Supreme Court, whatever it is that we're working on, we all have different parts to play in bringing that thing into fruition, and what do we need to play our part the best?

It's to have food when we want it, take a rest when we need it. It's to have connection with other human beings. It's to have an idea expressed, and have other people recognize that, and maybe add something else to it, and someone else adds something else to that, and to really be able to work collaboratively, accessing and moving from the places where we feel most equipped to say, "I can do something about that." Whether it's lighting, or writing a script, or creating a schedule, or making the food, or whatever it may be. The more we give ourselves and each other care, the greater the thing that we can produce out of any organization or institution.

And I don't mean produce, like the greater we can produce for the money. I mean, the greater we can reflect what our vision is for ourselves, for each other, the greater we can reflect it, when we can access it. Kind of what I was saying before, I didn't have access to my soundscapes, and my experiences, because I had a lot of gunk in here that was making me be a part of urgency culture, or thinking that I needed to demonstrate my worth, or give, give, give, give, as opposed to taking a breath, taking a space, and like, "Oh, I hear that sound. What could that mean?"

And now I have full soundscapes. I used to truly believe, I'm going to put this on a pod, I used to truly believe I didn't have the ability to harmonize. That wasn't a skill that I had. And then I did not create music. I couldn't make music. I could just sing other people's music. That was what I truly believed. And I think it's just important for me to always remember that, and to state it, because I love the soundscapes that I make, and they're literally me creating music by harmonizing with myself.

So I just want to name the limiting beliefs that were in here when I didn't have space, and time to pay attention to what was true, because I was so busy... Not so busy, that's too self judging. I was still going at such a pace that things were just sticking to me, and I didn't notice. And then when I could slow down and notice, and you can start... I can,

you can, we can, start flicking off, peeling off, hoisting off some of the ideas that we have about ourselves, and we have about other people.

Risa Shoup:

So we're talking about making space, we're talking about refusing urgency culture, you're talking about the flicking off. Can you offer us some ways that we might try to do those things to flick off, to say no to urgency culture, some concrete things that we could try?

Rebecca KellyG:

The first things that come up to me, for me practically for a person, are to listen to, and notice the things that you want, the things that excite you, and the things that you need, that you need. And I mean that in the smallest way possible. "Oh, I have to go to the bathroom. Oh, I need a glass of water. Oh, I think I just need to lay down for a second. My foot hurts." Whatever it might be, just starting with noticing a need, and then experimenting with meeting it for yourself. That would be the first thing that I would say, because I think that's the first step on the road of self-actualization, and creating space, because we can have the programming of, "This isn't a good time to go to the bathroom. This isn't a good time to have water. I should be dehydrated in this moment because I'm on a pod." I need to have a glass of water, to have a sip, on that note. That was a reflection of my need.

And when we start doing small things like that, we can also notice how hard they can be, and that can help us to see, "What are some of the messages that come up for me, when I think I'm actually going to interrupt this and say, 'I have to go to the bathroom?' I'm going to stop this person. 'Say, you know what? I need to check my phone because I'm worried about X, Y, Z thing.'" What comes up when we think about doing that? And what I like to do is write those things down, and spend some time with them. "Oh, why did that come up for me? What might that mean for me? What are some steps I can do to support myself?" As I sit with that question.

And discovering what things... And part of the reason I want to go through this too is I could say, I think people should meditate, and people should go to yoga. But I don't think that, I think people would be best served by discovering the things that serve their bodies, in particular, like what does your body need and want? And really, again, experimenting with giving that to yourself, and what it means to give that to yourself, and how does that feel for you?

Because I really believe the more comfortable a person is, this is my experience too, with themselves, and your own discomforts, your own challenges, your own pain, your own needs, then the more able you are to listen, and receive when other people are expressing theirs. Because if you haven't been able to take that time, sometimes when

other people express their pain, what I've experienced and noticed is that there's a knee-jerk of like, "How dare you say that? Do you know what I've been through? Do you know what I'm dealing with?"

And in that, to me, when I hear that come up is, "No, what are you dealing with? Are you sitting with what you need? Sounds like you have some things that you want dealt with. Is there someone that you want to bring that to? Is it you want to bring that to? What can you do to support yourself?" Because it can just feel enraging for people, when you see someone else speaking their pain, when you have not gotten an opportunity, where you feel like you haven't gotten an opportunity to be seen, noticed, held and supported for your own pain.

And I'm not saying that from a place of, "Therefore, if someone's shutting you down for your pain, just remember that they have pain too." I'm really not. That is true. You can remember that, if it does something for you, and I do think that is true, but it doesn't actually change the outcome. If you want to be a person who is aligned with values of equity, and justice, then you'll need to be open to the ways that you might be perpetuating inequity or injustice, because we are all we have, and all these institutions are made up of people.

And if everyone could start doing that work, then things could change, because it's up to us. It's up to us. And when certain people are not willing or able, and I really mean... You have a lot of experiences that have just caused a lot of gunk and backup, and so you don't have the space to reflect on yourself. That can happen. But then you might need to move out of the way, when the time for change comes, and you can't get on board with it. And if you can't reflect enough to see, "I have to move out of the way," then people might move you out of the way.

And hopefully, in that process, you'll notice, "I'm getting moved out of the way. There might be some stuff I need to look into." And we all have that in different ways. I think it's easy to think of a very particular example of that, but we all have ways that we bring ourselves down, and each other down. And so, I just want to encourage us all in that work, without whitewashing, or pretending there isn't a cis, hetero patriarchy with many other things that I didn't name that could be such a long... Interlocking systems of oppression, we'll just say.

Because I think sometimes, at least when I receive, sometimes, people sharing, "Hurt people hurt people, and we all have work to do. It can become very neutralized.

Therefore, there's no oppressors in the room." No, because what it means that hurt people hurt people is you might have something inside that's hurting, and you are causing harm to other people. And you should care for yourself, and we don't have to dehumanize each other to say, "You're no longer fit for this role. This is not a space for you. The way that you are holding yourself and your ideas about the world, the way those are manifesting are extremely harmful to people, and so you have to move out of

the way. And I hope for you that you are able to move through this, but you got to go." Sometimes that is what it is.

(Music)

Nicky Maggio:

Oh my God. Thank you so much Risa, for that beautiful interview with Rebecca KellyG I learned so much from that. I remember when we were preparing for this interview, you and I talked about, a little bit about your connection to sound, and to music, and how you have this personal relationship to that, especially when you talk about emotional regulation. So I would love to hear a little bit more about that, and that connection to music and sound, especially in a response to Rebecca's soundscapes.

Risa Shoup:

Yeah, I know that my entire life I've used music as a way to identify, and frankly just feel my emotions. I can think of so many examples of this, but certainly, as a child, I was afraid of the dark. Music helped me work through that fear, in order to sleep in a very tangible way. I remember just kind of like a watershed moment, when my parents and I realized that it would really help me to just have the radio on all night long, and that it wouldn't keep me awake. In fact, it would sort of again, kind of alleviate that fear, and allow me to sleep.

And certainly, I can think of so many instances where joy was enhanced through listening to specific songs. My college friends and I have long had a tradition at each other's weddings where we play "All My Friends" by LCD Sound System. And that's just a way for us to celebrate together always. So, music and sounds are things that I'm really sensitive to. And as we're saying, really used to process my emotions in a way that I think allows me to be more grounded.

Ashley J. Hicks:

That's really beautiful. I relate to music in the same way, so thanks for sharing that. This interview was so exciting for me, because I'm such a big fan of Rebecca KellyG. I've had a chance to take one of our workshops through A.R.T./New York, and also participate in the Room to Breathe virtual retreat this past May. And I pulled a lot from both of those experiences, so I'm just curious, what is something that's going to stick with you from this interview?

Risa Shoup:

I think something that really stays with me, as a person in a leadership role, is to not be afraid to change. I love my job at A.R.T./New York. I'm not trying to think about what's next or what's instead, but it's still really inspiring to hear from someone who has inhabited success in any number of roles, and who has never lost her focus on how to be additive to her communities, and also how to be in professional roles in a way that feels authentic and honest to her.

And therefore, Rebecca just seems fearless to make a change when she either identifies another way to be more present, and give more to her communities, or when she starts to realize, "This role that I have right now, regardless of what societal pressures I might be responding to, it doesn't feel honestly me, and in order to be my best self, I need to make a change."

Nicky Maggio:

Thank you so much, Risa. It's been such a pleasure to have you, not only just for this episode, but for our earlier episode, as we mentioned, "The Caregivers, Bringing Our Whole Selves". Listeners, make sure to go back and listen to that excellent episode that Risa conducted great interviews for. So thank you so much for being here.

Risa Shoup:

Thank you. This has been a pleasure.

Nicky Maggio:

And now for an extended soundscape by Rebecca KellyG.

Rebecca KellyG (soundscape):

Embracing and embodying your unique way of being is crucial to creating a more just and equitable world. Awaken to your own significance.

And that can be difficult to do, because despite the popular hashtag, it's not all love and light inside. That's there too, but there's also experiences we've had that we would just rather not remember, or lessons that we've internalized, that now we want to distance ourselves from, and that can all be uncomfortable to hold.

But we all only live in the paradigms that we know. So, if we want to move others to change their paradigms, to act in a way that we feel is just, or compassionate, then we need to know what that experience of change feels like. Because feelings of fear can appear when we begin to change, but there is a distinction between discomfort and danger. And the more we practice that change, the more we grow. So for the good of ourselves, and the good of our collective, we want to move into celebrating, wading in the waters of our own discomfort.

Because you cannot teach what you do not know. And people struggle to be what they cannot see. So, if you want to make change in society, it has to start within.

But it can be difficult to find the time to do that, because dominant culture moves at the pace of profit, at productivity over humanity, at networking over taking the time to genuinely form a connection with another human being. It just has us go, go, go, go marching, trying to keep up the pace.

But when we're marching like that, not listening to our own wisdom, learning from our own pain, our own challenges, our own successes, then we are susceptible to being taught the way of things from the outside.

Wear this shirt so they know you're a radical. Wear these pants so they know you're professional. These people are safe. Get close to them. These people are dangerous. Put them away. And some of those lessons that we internalized, they're about ourselves.

And many of us, to keep up with that pace, we put up a wall between ourselves and our pain.

And there's no shame in that. We all do what we need to do in order to survive. We do what we're conditioned to do. But when it comes time to thrive, and really serve our collective from our deepest place of integrity, and for us to shine, then that wall is going to have to come down.

Because the distance between the reality of that wish in our hearts for a more equitable world, the distance between that just being a wish, and making it a reality, it's in part that wall. We have to move through the fear, and see what lives here. How have I internalized those messages of hate and division and turn that towards myself, to myself? And how might I be perpetuating that towards others? Grab it. Move it through, push it to the side. Make space for your humanity to grow.

And we've seen examples of this type of work throughout time, from all places, from all genders. And today, we see the same. People speaking out, putting their hopes for this world, their pains they've experienced in this world, their ideas for our new world, they put them into our well. And look at the ripple effect. Recognize the value. The people you touch, the things that you do, we're all connected, affected by you. And so, the work that you engage in, it is not personally transformative, though it is. For our collective, it could be, it is transcendent.

And when you engage in that work, you'll find that there are others who are here, who will walk with you, who will guide you, and will support you. And here, in this place, we can receive that love, because we aren't afraid of the type of intimacy that that level of connection can bring, because we aren't afraid of that mirror, to see ourselves, because we know that we can move through, and dance with any discomfort that arises.

And here in this place, we can welcome ourselves, and others into spaces with open arms, because we know that difference is a teacher, and tension is a gift.

Now, where is all that dissonance, and discomfort that we had at the start? It's a part of the whole, it's not all there is. It's a part of the whole. It's not all there is. It's integrated.

Now, here in this place, we no longer reach for perfection. No, because we see, but that's reaching for someone else's definition of what is, and what could be. And we make our own features now. We walk with our love, we walk with our challenges, we walk with our pain. We bring our whole humanity to the table, and we do that with our heads held high.

As within, so without. Nothing comes for free. I'm going to take care of me, so I can take care of you, and we can take care of we.

The time is now. The path is clear. Nothing comes for free. Take care of you. I'll take care of me. And we can take care of we. We can take care of. We can take care of we.

The people you touch, the things that you do, we're all connected, affected by you. The people you touch, the things that you do, we're all connected, affected by you. We're all connected, affected by you. Within. We're all connected. Because we're all connected by you. by you. We're all connected. Because we're all connected by you. start. By you. We're all connected. Because we're all connected by you. Start by you. We're all connected. Because we're all connected by you. Start by you. We're all connected. Because we're all connected by you. Start by you. We're all connected. Because we're all connected by you. Start by you. We're all connected. Because we're all connected by you. Start by you. We're all connected, because we're all connected by you. Start by you. We're all connected.

(Music)

Nicky Maggio:

We hope you enjoyed this episode. If you have, remember to subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. Visit A.R.T./New York to learn more about our many programs and offerings, including our very own "What's Off?" Podcast. Until next time.

Ashley J. Hicks:

At A.R.T./New York, we empower our community to define their own vision for success, and always keep an eye out for what's next. Our responsive resources, just like this podcast, illuminate truly innovative solutions to the toughest challenges facing our field. You can support the next wave of theatrical innovation by visiting our website at art-newyork.org/donate, to make a donation today. Thank you.

Nicky Maggio:

“What's Off?” Is a production of Art New York, Executive Producer David E. Shane, Associate Producer Erica Wray Barnes, Line Producers Ashley J. Hicks and Nicky Maggio, with Audio Engineering by Catalin Media.