

#NWConnect Karim Khan Podcast Transcript

NB. Your hosts, Kim and Amelia are in bold.

Intro Music: Snappy, an instrumental and upbeat jazz track plays underneath the opening dialogue. It features clicks and a bass guitar.

Kim Glassman 0:00

Hello, and welcome to Northwall Connect

Amelia Thornber 0:02

a new podcast series where we talk to the talented artists featured here at the North Wall Arts Centre

Kim Glassman 0:07

brought to you by your host, Kim

Amelia Thornber 0:08

and Amelia.

Amelia Thornber:

Today, I caught up with writer Karim Khan, we spoke about writing for the stage and for the screen, the Catalyst programme at the North Wall, the local Arts scene here in Oxford, and he gives some great advice for early career writers. Hi, Karim, can you tell our listeners a little bit about who you are and what you do?

Karim Khan 0:28

Hi, there. Yeah. So I'm I'm a playwright and screenwriter. And yeah, I'm born and bred in Oxford. And so yeah, I guess that's pretty much what I do. I write plays. And also, I've been working on some TV scripts, and projects as well. So just been doing that really.

Amelia Thornber 0:50

And we first met back in 2019, which seems like a lifetime ago now, when the world was a bit more normal at the Intro to Directing course at the North Wall. Can you tell us a bit about your relationship with the North Wall?

Karim Khan 1:03

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I remember, kind of emailing John and Ria quite a long time ago, I think when they first started at the North Wall. And I just thought I'd introduce myself and kind of get to know them. And I remember kind of going in for a chat with them. And I remember them being kind of really supportive. And, you know, they read a play that I had written as well. And they were like, you know, keep in touch. And it's weird how much you're used to that phrase, being banded around. And you think, oh, you'll never hear from that person again. And it's like, that happens so many times in general meetings. But you know, I think John and Ria have completely kept to their word. And like been incredibly supportive and lovely, and supportive to me as a writer and given me so many opportunities. So I, yeah, when I was, I think that was the first project that I was kind of involved with that directing

course, which was really fun. And kind of learning more about directing. And then after that, I did the Catalyst programme, as well. And kind of working with kind of other directors and actors as well. And kind of just working on some ideas and plays, which was really good. And since then, I've been kind of working on the new play commission with the North Wall as well, which has been really cool to explore like a new idea with them, and being a Propeller Artist as well, and kind of supporting the North Wall, but also the North Wall supporting me, which has been really cool to kind of have those sorts of conversations.

Amelia Thornber 2:45

It's really nice to see that journey that you've had with the North Wall. And I've had quite a similar one. As you said, Ria and John totally do stick by their word of keep in touch - they don't let you go once, once they've got you. And it's so nice to have that connection with the local theatre, I think. Did you want to talk a bit about Oxford in general? I know you said you're born and bred.

Karim Khan 3:02

Yeah, definitely. I think, um, yeah, it's so nice to have, like, you know, to have the North Wall in Oxford and like to have like, you know, theatres and arts organisations who are like, actively sort of engaged in creativity. And, you know, I've had I've had great experiences with Pegasus theatre as well, who are also in Oxford and kind of working on a play commission with them a few years ago. And, and also like the Oxford Playhouse, which is where I, I did like a writer on attachment scheme. So I've had so many great experiences, being in Oxford creatively and you know, when I was really young, when I was a teenager, I was, I learned about filmmaking through with Film Oxford, who are in East Oxford, I think that was the very beginning. And so I feel like Oxford has always been there, for me as like a source of where I can kind of develop my craft and you know, meet other creatives and stuff. But yeah, having said that, it does feel quite weird in terms of my experience of Oxford is very different to like, the image that people have of Oxford this like this kind of university town sort of thing. And I feel like that feels quite alien and distant from my experience and view of Oxford, and because I guess I've been I've lived here all my life and yeah, it's, it's very peculiar, like even going into the centre of Oxford, it feels like a very different space.

Amelia Thornber 4:30

I totally know what you mean. I don't really know how to how to explain it in words, but as again, someone who's grown up here and I've got family here. Yeah, it's it's totally different being a resident here and not just being here for the uni side of things.

Karim Khan 4:45

Yeah, absolutely.

Amelia Thornber 4:46

So where did your love of writing come from? Did you always know you wanted to go into writing?

Karim Khan 4:51

I think kind of similar to most writers like I've always kind of loved storytelling. I think like even as a kid like I think I loved kind of creating stories. And kind of, you know, I guess, like

out of kind of model characters and stuff, stuff like that. And I think so I've always been quite obsessed by kind of creating stories and make believe worlds I think, I think as a child, but then when I was kind of a teenager, I think I became more interested in filmmaking. And so I learned about kind of making films at Film Oxford. And they'd kind of taught me a lot about kind of making films and documentaries, and I started making a few documentaries. So I think that's kind of how it sort of developed, I kind of became more interested in the film elements. And then I kind of moved into theatre when I went to university. So when I studied English, I became more interested in theatre and writing plays, and I started writing a few plays. And just and I knew at that point, they weren't quite great. And, but it was more for me to kind of develop my craft and like, just keep writing...

Amelia Thornber 6:02

Would you say, for any budding writers out there, maybe just go for it, write the play, even if it's not great. Just get something down on paper?

Karim Khan 6:09

Yeah, 100%, I think that's, I think, just don't be afraid to make kind of mistakes, and just don't feel that you have to make something perfect. You know, it's, it won't be perfect it, it will be, it's, and it's not about being perfect. It's about writing something that you enjoy. And I think, I think that's the most important thing, like enjoying what you do. And like, and so yeah, I think just go for it. Like, there's nothing, there's nothing you can lose.

Amelia Thornber 6:37

I think in a world where we can be so vulnerable and honest with work, and a lot of work nowadays is autobiographical, you're putting yourself out there, and it can be quite daunting, and you want it to be perfect. But as you say, I think that you need to enjoy it and just just do it, because it's a learning process, after all, and your first project especially is never going to be as good as your last. So yeah,

Karim Khan 7:03

Yeah, absolutely. And I think when, you know, when you are writing about, you know, personal things about yourself, I think, obviously, immediately you care about what you're writing. And I think that that that's more important than anything else, like if you care about what you're writing, that will already do so much to the work itself, like you can you can feel that in a in a play, or you can feel that in a story that start a writer cares for what they're talking about. Yeah.

Amelia Thornber 7:30

So you're now branching out into writing for TV. And it sounds like you've already worked a lot in film. But how would you compare that to to writing for the stage?

Karim Khan 7:40

Yes, I think yeah, it's interesting, like, so since I graduated from the NF Ts, I graduated in 2019. I kind I've kind of been writing more, I've been working more on TV projects. And yeah, it's so interesting, how very different to kind of writing for theatre, I think, like, the immediate thing is like, stylistically, and it feels quite different, I guess. And having said that, like, I love both mediums, and I love writing for theatre and for TV, like, I feel like TV, you can explore, you know, the, the intensity of like, the camera does so much in terms of how close

you can get to a character and the intensity and the emotion of that. And also editing like what, you know, what scene where you put the scene and what, you know, the positioning and arrangement of the, of a series of scenes. But what I loved about theatre was like, you know, characters on stage and the dramatic space between them and, you know, theatricality and what the way you can play with form and the way you can, like, push boundaries. But it's interesting how much recently on TV, we're seeing the blurring of those forms, like a lot of kind of TV shows that I've been on and the really standout ones like I May Destroy You, are ones where theatre are very present in them. And it's you feel how, you know, form is so bombastic, right, it feels like, it feels like a play, it feels very theatrical. And so I think that's something that I'm kind of taking in quite a lot in terms of like how, you know, theatre and TV don't necessarily have to be two very different forms, they can, like merge into each other. So when I'm writing a TV script, I can have like a set piece between two characters on a dinner table, and there's like, a lot of dialogue, and there's a lot of tension between them the kind of thing you see on the stage, and then, but even on the stage, you can put something very visual, which you could see on TV and I think so I'm the interchangeability is something I'm quite excited by.

Amelia Thornber 9:46

These lines are becoming more blurred. So that's really interesting. Do you have anything exciting in the pipeline?

Karim Khan 9:52

I think all I'll say is that I'm really like, excited by the stuff I'm working on and yeah, even though like it feels like a lot of it is quite early days and will take a long time. And I think that just the fact that, you know, I'm trying to kind of engage myself in different things, but I'm really excited about the play that I'm working with on the North Wall, as well. And I think, yeah, why I'm more excited about theatre is like the immediacy of like working with actors working in the space, And that whole collaborative process.

Amelia Thornber 10:28 I'm assuming that it's a much longer process in TV than it is with theatre.

Karim 10:38

Yeah, I think it's a much longer process. And I haven't really, because the projects I'm working on a quite early days, but I haven't really seen the full nature of them, full nature of that process. So but I think, yeah, it's much longer. And I think that's why like, you have to be so patient with stuff. But yeah, I just love how like immediate theatre is compared to it.

Amelia Thornber 10:52

Do you have any tips for any new writers out there?

Karim Khan 10:55

Yeah, I think like, going back to what I was saying, like, you know, enjoy, the most important thing is that you enjoy what you do. And don't be afraid to make mistakes. Just take, you know, feel free to take risks and keep learning and stretching yourself, I think. Because, you know, yeah, what's the worst that can happen? Like, I think feel that you can do absolutely anything, and nothing is off limits for you. I think also, you know, work with people who support you, and who are really, you know, your favourite people, the people who are kind of

really supportive and encouraging, and, but also, who can challenge you in the right way? And who can give you, you know, stimulating conversations. And then I guess the last thing I'd say is, you deserve to write and no one shares the same life and experience and view of the world as you do. And I think that's important to remember both because I think it's very easy to feel like imposter syndrome in terms of like, "Oh, you know, I don't deserve this. I haven't done enough", but also to feel, I guess, maybe envious of like, the fact you're not doing as well as certain people and comparing yourself and I think, I think this industry is so huge. There's so many people in it. And everyone who's in it deserves to have their story told, so just own your story and own yourself, I think, and don't, Yeah, and just write what you want to write because people want to hear that.

Amelia Thornber 12:27

That was really lovely advice, thank you, Karim. So what are you looking forward to coming up in the next year - and that doesn't have to be work related, just life returning back to normal?

Karim Khan 12:36

Yeah, absolutely. I think I think that is the biggest thing that I'm looking forward to hopefully kind of life returning back to usual and just being able to do other things. Like I guess, like going to the theatre and seeing plays. And I think I already feel like, I feel like, it's weird to think how inspiring theatre is in terms of like watching other people's work and watching plays and watching actors on stage. And that those magical moments, which can feel so inspirational. And so I'm looking forward to, I think the biggest thing is I'm looking forward to being inspired by the world again, and like, hopefully having new experiences, which are different to the one we've had in the past year, which I think, you know, I feel like the past year, even though it's been like, quite, you know, we've kind of been in the, like, it's been like, stasis, but I think it has given us experiences, and it's made us think, but I'm hoping I'm looking forward to like, what the next year kind of gives us and what it provides for us. And I guess, like maybe workwise, I guess, like related to theatre, like I'm looking forward to hopefully kind of being in a room with people like actors and like, and just collaborating. And I feel like rehearsal rooms are like my favourite part of the process. And it's weird, because you think that writing is all about like being on the computer and being on your own. But I think the solitariness is something which I, I really don't like. So it's like, I love kind of being around other people and like, thinking about the work, so I'm looking forward to that part again.

Amelia Thornber 14:11

That's definitely such a fun part, being in the rehearsal room and collaboration. I think everyone's missed it. As soon as we can be in those rehearsal spaces and not have to distance and stuff it's going to be such a joyous space. And I know earlier on we spoke a little bit about Catalyst. I was just wondering if you could expand on that for some of the listeners who might not yet know what that project is that we run at the North Wall.

Karim Khan 14:30

So yeah, Catalyst is a residency programme, where an ensemble group of actors, are kind of brought together a small group of writers, a few writers are brought together and a few directors and, and it's essentially, yeah, it's like an arts lab. So it's called an Artslab. And it's

a process where, you know, a writer will be given the chance to write a new play or potentially like rework an existing play, and then a director comes on board, and they would kind of it's their role to kind of direct the play, bring it to its feet, and, and then a few actors from that ensemble group would come on board to essentially be that last part of that process and essentially bring that piece to life. And so it's a two week programme, in which all of that happens. So it's kind of very intense, and very sort of rigorous. But I think that's something from my memory, like, I think that's what everyone loved about how intensive it was like, you know, how quickly the actors had to learn those lines, and like, and be on that stage and be able to do it. And there was something quite thrilling about that. And especially from a writer's perspective, like the idea that you have to like, have finished something by the end of that first week in order for the directors to take it on board and stuff. And so I think that that was the greatest thing. And I think it's such a great opportunity for writers, directors and actors to just take risks, make mistakes and stuff and I think it's a really incredible programme.

Outro Music: Snappy, an instrumental and upbeat jazz track plays underneath the opening dialogue. It features clicks and a bass guitar.

Amelia Thornber 16:08

Perfect. Thank you so much for your time.

Karim Khan 16:10

No worries at all. It was good, really enjoyed it.

Amelia Thornber 16:16

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Kim Glassman 16:19

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Amelia Thornber 16:25

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Kim Glassman 16:29

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