

S8 Ep4: Khawla Ibraheem talks to Susan Wokoma

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Susan Wokoma: Hello and welcome to the Royal Court Court Theatre Playwrights Podcast with me, Susan Wokoma. In this episode, we are going to be talking about an upcoming play that's going to be playing downstairs here at the Royal Court Theatre called A Knock on the Roof with playwright and performer, Khawla Ibraheem Now, this is the really embarrassing bit because I'm going to read your intro and say how brilliant you are and wonderful, and I know that a lot of playwrights really, really struggle with this. So you just have to, you just have to suck it up. I'm afraid [they laugh] So, Khawla Ibraheem is a playwright, actor and director based in the Majdal Shams in the occupied Golan Heights. She is a regular at many theatres in Palestine, including El Hakawati the Palestinian National Theatre, the Freedom Theatre and Al Jawal Theatre. Outside of Palestine, she has collaborated with many theatres and institutions, including as a fellow at the McDowell and as an artist in residence at the Sundance Theatre Lab, where she met longtime collaborator, director Oliver Butler. Khawla's one woman play, A Knock on the Roof, premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2024 to great critical acclaim. It has gone on to have runs in Dublin and New York and opens at the Royal Court Theatre this month. Khawla Ibraheem welcome to the Playwright's Podcast.

Khawla Ibraheem: Thank you. And thank you very much for having me.

Susan Wokoma: Pleasure to have you. Now, I ask everybody this right at the beginning. What is your earliest memory of theatre?

Khawla Ibraheem: So my first memory of a theatre is when I was a child. There was a group of actors that came to the village and they did a show. It's a puppet show. They were called. I don't want to be wrong, but I think they were called something like Ears of Wheat or something like that.

Susan Wokoma: Ears of Wheat?

Khawla Ibraheem: Yeah, Ears of wheat. That's how you say it, right? Like it's the plant.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah, like wheat.

Khawla Ibraheem: Yeah, exactly like wheat. And they had like this puppet show that they did and I was very excited to see. So me and my cousin, we just went back home and we started playing theatre. So we would hang a curtain on the balcony at my grandmother's house. And my grandmother's house is second floor, and the kids would like. The kids of the neighbourhood would sit at the street and we would be performing from behind the curtain with, like, small puppets that were just like, Yeah, it was, just created it like. And we started, like, doing small plays. So that's like, that's that's the first thing I ever remember, like, seeing theatre or, like, having an exchange in the theatre. Yeah.

Susan Wokoma: Do you remember how old you were at that time?

Khawla Ibraheem: I'm not sure if I was even, like, first grade or second grade. It was

like, very little. Yeah, really, really little.

Susan Wokoma: Would you say that puppetry, because it is a really specific art form. Like, would you say that, just to kind of jump down a few of my questions, would you say that's influenced you in any way? That very first encounter of theatre? Do you think that you've made a link to how you tell or how you've chosen to tell stories?

Khawla Ibraheem: So how I chose to tell stories is actually. It might be connected to this also, but it's something that I also inherited from my grandmother. She's, the first actress I ever knew. She's not an actress, she's just my grandmother. But she's... She used to, like, tell me stories all the time. And storytelling, for me, it always reminds me of her of my grandmother. Whenever I'm on stage or whenever I'm, like, telling a story or something I always have her in my mind. So, yeah, that's, This is like, that storytelling comes from her.

Susan Wokoma: Amazing. So when do you think... When do you think that the idea of that actually becoming your purpose, your vocation, when did that happen for you, like, and what was the kind of triggering moment that made you think, oh, I might commit my life to this?

Khawla Ibraheem: Yeah, it's all, like, all of the stories that I'm gonna be telling. It has to do something to do with my childhood. But, like, of course, yeah, I figured this out, like, very early and at a very early stage in my life that I wanted to become a theatre person. I was 13, seventh grade, and I signed up, my mom signed me up for an acting class in the village. And I remember walking into the theatre and there was a director that was, like, about to work with us for the acting class, like, for the course there. And I remember, like, I entered and he was standing. He came all, like, long way to the

village. He was driving, like, for around two hours or something, and he was eating a sandwich and he's, like, welcoming the children while he's, like,

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Khawla Ibraheem: eating. and I just felt very comfortable looking at him and looking at the space and being there. I was like, this is a place where I can belong, actually, and feel safe here. I don't know what was it exactly, but that moment is something that has like.. stays with me,

Susan Wokoma: Especially him eating the Sandwich. It's kind of like, I think that sometimes people can think that theatre is this really serious, sacred thing, but actually when you walk into a room and someone's just having a snack,

Khawla Ibraheem: Exactly!

Susan Wokoma: It's like, oh, okay, relaxed.

Khawla Ibraheem: Yeah, yeah. It's like, it's a very basic need. And I felt like, very comfortable, like, being in a place that respects that. I think also in a way I was like. I was again, I was like 13, so I'm not sure what is exactly the feeling that I had there, but something in me was like, I love this place. I love this energy. I want to stick around it. And since then, like, I just. I have been in with the theatre group. It's a children's theatre group that was based in Majdal Shams in my village by the writer Mataz Abu Saleh. And I, like, I owe him my career, honestly. So I just, like, I stayed with that group until I finished high school and straight away I went to the university. Like, I never had other thoughts, what I want to do with my life

Susan Wokoma: Really? Wow

Khawla Ibraheem: Since that moment.

Susan Wokoma: Wow. And so when you then eventually went to university, what did you. What did you study there and how. Because I guess that a lot of the time when people think of universities, it's. It's very kind of theoretical rather than it being, you know, kind of, yeah, physical.

Khawla Ibraheem: I did. I did like, both. I studied both. I studied in Haifa University, which has an acting slash directing, a bachelor degree there, which is both theoretical and practise in theatre. And I spent there three years. I learned so much and I got to meet a lot of the people that I. They will be my colleagues for the future. So, yeah, it was like I was. And I was 18, so, like, I graduated when I was 21 and I started working as an actress at the beginning, A few years into working as an actress, I figured out I want more. Like, I want to do more things in theatre. Not only acting, because acting is something that you always depend on the opportunity to like, you know, for a director or a writer or a theatre to cast you in some shows. And the scene back home is also very different and way smaller than, like, when we think about the theatrical scene in London or in New York or. So it's like back home, it's way smaller also. So the opportunities are also, like, there are less and less opportunities and. And I just thought that I can create something for myself.

Susan Wokoma: Absolutely.

Khawla Ibraheem: So I started writing at this point where I decided that I want more. And, yeah, I started writing and then I figured that I might also want to try and stage

what I wrote. So I started like doing more like. Yeah, multidiscipline things in the, in the theatre.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah.

Khawla Ibraheem: Yes.

Susan Wokoma: Just to go back to university and when you were studying, this is quite a big question. Someone asked me this and I'm going to ask you, what was the most important thing that you learned and what was the least important thing that you learned?

Khawla Ibraheem: Okay. [Susan laughs] The most important thing that I learned in the ah, university is a very basic thing about like and I, I learned it in a in a class where I did not think of it about writing. But like later on I started noticing that this is how I write also.

Susan Wokoma: Okay.

Khawla Ibraheem: And it's about listening. I learned like how to listen to the others' stories and how to create something out of that. So for me listening is the key in making theatre. Sometimes as an artist we tend to be very self centred.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Khawla Ibraheem: So... and I think the most important thing I learned in that class is how to open up to other things and just like receive and fill yourself with other things

and allow it, to allow it to sink like in you and then go out, like channel it out. And the least important thing I- mmm.. That's a tough one.

Susan Wokoma: It is a tough one.

Khawla Ibraheem: Yeah.

Susan Wokoma: Or is there anything that you learned that at the time you were like that's, I'm not going to use that, that then later on...

Khawla Ibraheem: This this class actually.

Khawla Ibraheem: It's the same like, it's the same class. The one like with like it was, it was called like Observing and Listening. And I just thought that it's like some class that the, the university made up, you know, to fill time and points so you can graduate eventually. And I was like, what is this? Like it's, you know.. and the teacher would give us like all

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Khawla Ibraheem: these exercises. It's like, you know, when you go in the train, listen to the conversation of the people sitting next to you.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah.

Khawla Ibraheem: And try like to, to write it down. And I was like, that's creepy. [they laugh]

Susan Wokoma: Right? Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Khawla Ibraheem: But then.. when I started writing I discovered that this is one of the most important things and useful things that I ever learned in the university.

Susan Wokoma: So what was the first play that you ever wrote?

Khawla Ibraheem: The first play that I ever wrote. it's called in translation to English, it's called *Soon to Be Gone*. And it's about a woman from, originally from the Golan Heights, the place I come from. And she is a daughter of immigrant Golan Heights parents that live in Damascus and she decides to come back to the Golan Heights. So she falls in love with a guy from the Golan Heights and she tries to find her way to come back from Damascus to the Golan Heights. Because, to those who don't know, there's like, it's.. the Golan Heights is an occupied area and the access to Syria is not possible at all. It's like there's even a minefield between the Golan Heights and Syria. So she just tries like, to find a legal way to cross and she does cross and she has like this very utopic idea about like the Golan Heights from the stories that her parents tell her and. And then she meets the reality of the Golan Heights, which is like, you know, another regular place with like small villages and people and. And so it's like it's between this, like. Yeah, longing to a place and the reality of the place itself. Yeah, it was one of that. It was one of the things that I first wrote and like, full play that I wrote and directed

Susan Wokoma: And how long did that take you to write?

Khawla Ibraheem: About a year between research and writing and drafting and then. Yeah, something. And then also in rehearsals we did some rewriting.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah, of course.

Khawla Ibraheem: Yes.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah. And so let's just quickly jump to A Knock on the Roof, which I've read and it is an extraordinary play.

Khawla Ibraheem: Thank you.

Susan Wokoma: It's absolutely wonderful to read and please come watch it, but do also buy the playtext because I found it really fascinating to read. For anyone that hasn't looked online or didn't catch it at Edinburgh or New York, can you please tell us what the play is about?

Khawla Ibraheem: The play is about a mother. Ah, briefly to say. It's about a mother that does her best to save herself, her son and her mother in a crazy wartime. So she's like. Yeah, she's someone that is trying to figure out a way how to survive this in the best way ever.

Susan Wokoma: It's, I mean, the thing that really caught me off guard and I mean, I don't know why it would catch me off guard because this play is so much about humanity and how people cope during suffering and people are funny. It's so funny. It really threw me, [they laugh] this.. because it's, you know, the thing that I find really powerful about it is its humour but like how people cope and people's relationships and longing and what that can bring out in everybody. And also if you faced a lot of, difficulty and trauma and how you wear that as opposed to somebody who might be reading it and thinking, why are you laughing in this moment? Or why have you found that? Or

thought of that neighbour and picking Yasmin in the gym. Yeah, that just kept coming back to me. I just thought it was really brilliant. So how long did it take you to craft this play? And, it's an obvious question, but just for the sake of the podcast and anyone listening, why did you think it was important to write this play?

Khawla Ibraheem: Okay, so I'll start with like, talking a little bit about the humour in the play.

Susan Wokoma: Yes, please.

Khawla Ibraheem: Ah, by saying that to me, it's very important to have humour in this kind of place because it is a way to connect to the audience also. And also I think if we all go back and have a look at our lives, we will see that in the most difficult moments, what we searched for is this... Moments of joy because we want to hold onto something. We want to keep ourselves distracted. Or so it was like.. To me it was very important, like, to have a play that has a sense of humour in it and that this sense of humour also feels natural and not forced into the play.

Susan Wokoma: Yes,

Khawla Ibraheem: Writing the play was a very long process. This play started in 2014 as a 10 minutes monologue, which I never thought it would

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Khawla Ibraheem: develop into something more than that. I wrote this monologue. There was a war happening at the time. In 2014, I wrote this monologue and I forgot

about it. I saved it, but like, I forgot about it. And years later I meet Oliver in, Sundance Theatre Lab. And Oliver and I immediately understand that we have the same way of understanding theatre and dealing with theatre and creating theatre. And we immediately start dreaming of developing more and more projects together. And then this play comes back to my mind that like, I have this monologue, that I, I think it can hold an entire play. And then Covid hits. Because Oliver and I met in 2019.

Susan Wokoma: Okay.

Khawla Ibraheem: Covid hits. So we stopped, like, we stopped like, we kept it dreaming, but like there, we kept talking, we kept in contact and we kept dreaming about project. But like, everything in Covid felt like, you know, unnecessary and like, you know, we never know what is the next step for us.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah,

Khawla Ibraheem: And then I visited New York in, I think it was 2021. Not sure about the dates, but I visited New York and I met with Oliver and we started like, talking again about all the projects. And then I shared with him this idea about this woman that trains to run, in order to survive her life. To save her life. And he loved the idea and he was like, start writing. I think it's a good idea. I think it's something that can be a play, like, can develop to a play. So I started writing and Oliver and I, for I think a half a year or something like that, I kept sending him drafts and he would send me notes and I would send him more drafts and he would send me more notes. And... Yeah. And then we met in person, we develop it a little bit more and it took like over. Yeah, I think it took more than two years. Like since we started even writing, like Oliver and I, it was like a two years thing. And we kept like.. Honestly, we keep editing until like this moment in the

New York previews. We were editing. We were still editing the text and writing things. Because it's a play that also communicates a lot with the people.

Susan Wokoma: Yes, yes. There is actually there's interaction in the audience.

Khawla Ibraheem: Exactly. So I learned a lot about the play from interacting with the people

Susan Wokoma: Great, okay.

Khawla Ibraheem: and like looking at them and seeing like how they receive the play. So I also again, like with the class in the school, like listening and observing, it's like the process with the people teach me a lot about the play. So I also keep the play open to more ideas. So there were a few things that we rewrote during, during the rehearsals in New York now, recently, and some adjustments that were done in the previews.

Susan Wokoma: May I ask what some of or like one of the changes. What were one of the things that you realised that you needed to change?

Khawla Ibraheem: There was one scene that since the beginning of the writing of the play, I always felt that it's forced-

Susan Wokoma: Okay!

Khawla Ibraheem: -In the play. And I never actually like, understood like why I feel about it that way. And it's a scene with the mother. It's about. It's a memory with the mother. And during the run in Edinburgh, in Dublin, before we arrived to New York, I just kept

having this feeling and like, you know, sometimes when you're also performing your own writing, there are a lot of feelings that you need to put aside because like you say, okay, this is the actor in me speaking, about the scene, not the writer. But like, I just kept having this questions mark about the scene. And when we arrived at New York for rehearsals, I shared this with Oliver. I was like, listen, I can't stand the scene. I can't. [they laugh]

Susan Wokoma: Sounds like an actress. [more laughter]

Khawla Ibraheem: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. I was like, it was a fully actress thing. It was like, I can't I know. I don't know who wrote it. I don't wanna [more laughter]

Susan Wokoma: Bring the writer!

Khawla Ibraheem: Exactly. Tell the writer I'm not performing. [Susan's laughter continues] So we started talking about it and then I realised, what is that? What is the problem? And we actually just like, I just like, we rewrote it in the rehearsal room. Just like. And it changed entirely. Like the entire scene changed.

Susan Wokoma: Wow.

Khawla Ibraheem: And then once, once we changed it, it became one of my favourite scenes. And I also recently discovered that it's like, Lisa, she's our production manager and stage manager, she's like, also. It's also one of her favourite scenes. So I was like, it's something that it communicates with people and I see people's face during the scene and now I know that it communicates with them. I think the scene was before. It was very far away from the audience. That's why I didn't like it.

Susan Wokoma: Right, okay. And actually you learn how much you have to bring things to the audience when you perform it. It's really interesting because I've definitely been in situations as an actress where you're

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Susan Wokoma: performing something and no offence, no offence to the writers, but sometimes you're performing something and it can seem very removed and you don't want to step on toes, but you're like. The physical sensation of playing something probably demands a little bit more kind of closeness or contact with the audience. So the fact that you were able to figure that out and then change it, that's kind of the beauty of being-

Khawla Ibraheem: I totally agree with you. I think like, the combination of like, trusting the writer process, but also trusting the actresses, presence on stage and the fact that the actors receive something back when they are acting from the audience and they can judge what they are doing based on that is something that, I benefit from a lot from this process. And also, like looking back at things that I wrote and directed? Now I understand a lot of the notes that the good actors were giving me. And like, I did not get that when I was writing and directing because again, in, we, like, as artists in general, we are very like self centred sometimes. So it's like very hard for like a writer or director to hear a note saying, like, I don't.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah- it's a lot of ego!

Khawla Ibraheem: Yeah, exactly. So and now I understand, like, I learned way more about this, like going through this process.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah.

Khawla Ibraheem: Yeah.

Susan Wokoma: Amazing. And what is incredible, is the fact that. And I think this is really important for anyone that, you know, is thinking of writing, the fact that this was an idea that was from 2014, a 10 minute monologue. And now it's going to be here at the Royal Court. Is amazing. How many- because I was told, one of the bits of advice that I was given was, Susan, have a drawer full of ideas. They could be half ideas, they could be 10 minutes, 5 minutes, 1 line and just keep them. And then every so often just go back into the drawer and see what sings to you. So do you have, like your drawer full of abandoned ideas or is it all kind of quite organised? Because my drawer is a mess.

Khawla Ibraheem: Does my notes on my iPhone work as a drawer? [they laugh]

Susan Wokoma: That's a draw. It's a draw now.

Khawla Ibraheem: That's what I do. Yeah,

Susan Wokoma: Just put anything that comes to mind.

Khawla Ibraheem: Yeah, anything that comes to mind. I just like, put it in a note and every few months I just like go, like, go through the notes I have on my iPhone. And yeah, I just like. It's something that I don't even delete, even if I think it's stupid. Even months later, there are. I have a lot of stupid ideas. It's like, you know, this is what we are. We are made out of, like, lots of stupid ideas. That one of them would be, like, good enough one day.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah.

Khawla Ibraheem: And then it will change everything. But, like, we need to also, like, writing your stupid ideas out will empty, like, the stupid ideas out and allow more space for good ideas to come in. So it's just like. Yeah, whenever I have an idea, I just like, write it,

Susan Wokoma: Just get it out and then it takes up less space. Yeah, that's such a good, quite deep answer, actually. What I. I mean, it's kind of inevitable that people who come to see this will feel the immediacy of this play and everything that's going on in Palestine at the moment right now that we've had to witness. But, you know, that's what is kind of, I think, in terms of, the history of what's happened in Palestine. What's so... And actually the mother says this- She says, this isn't my first war. I think it's really important that that's landed that and that people know that you've written this so long ago and that it feels so completely, immediate. Was there anything in the writing that you had to change in order to kind of reflect what is going on right now?

Khawla Ibraheem: Only one sentence.

Susan Wokoma: Only one. I got actually chills from you saying that. Sorry, what was the one sentence? Do you mind sharing?

Khawla Ibraheem: No, I don't. I'll share the sentence and I'll say like why it was like, When the last war broke, we were about to open in Haifa. We were like weeks from opening. Oliver was back home, like in Haifa. we had the team there and we were rehearsing. And then the last war broke and we needed to cancel everything. And the reality was so loudly screaming that I felt the play was so irrelevant because compared

to what was happening, everything felt like small and unnecessary and the wrong timing. And I actually like had a thought about like not having the play ever. Like, that's it. Like, I was like, okay, that's it. I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna do this play. It's like it became too real to the point where it was ridiculous to have it as a play because it's all over. And

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Khawla Ibraheem: having piece by piece, our co producers and the producers of the Edinburgh and Dublin, co producers here and in New York and the producers of the tour production that we have, we had a lot of meetings with them during this period and we were just like talking like to see if ever we want to do the play again. And they suggested that I come to New York. Like I go to New York again and Oliver and I can revisit the material and decide if we ever want to do something with the material or we want to change something or we just want to forget the entire idea and go back to our lives. And so I did, in December, like with all the crazy situation that was happening, I flew to New York and being in the rehearsal room with Oliver again, it made us realise that this was more relevant than ever. And it doesn't even need to change. Yeah, the only thing that needed to change is that like towards the end I say the sentence, this is really happening. That's all. So it's like this is the only thing that we added. It's the moment where like Mariam, stands on the roof and sees the war and then it's like, it's really happening. So it's not. It's both Mariam realising that this war is real, but also the actors saying, this is not just a play, this is something that is really happening out there. So this is the only thing

Susan Wokoma: That's the only thing?

Khawla Ibraheem: Yes.

Susan Wokoma: I find that astounding. And it just shows you the power of storytelling, how it can just live and live and live and live and still feel incredibly.

Khawla Ibraheem: Yeah. And it also, like, you know, it also should enlighten something about like the reality that is repeating itself. That did not actually change since 2014 to 2022 to the last draft in [20]24. It's like it's. Yeah. The reality has been ridiculously like repeating itself. Over and over and. Yeah. [they take a moment to pause]

Susan Wokoma: Kind of touching on what you said before when you said that it was. It felt so real that it felt ridiculous. What do you think is the importance or place of art during conflict? Because I think that, in this country, it's fair to say that there is this belief that not for everyone and definitely not if you're listening to this podcast, but I think that people can see art as like a luxurious thing that isn't a necessity. What do you feel about that? Like how do you feel like it's helped you or, or it's important.

Khawla Ibraheem: First of all, I deeply believe that art is a necessity. Not because I believe it, but because it's a reality. If we look at the history-

Susan Wokoma: Agreed.

Khawla Ibraheem: -the fact that something survived all these years, like since the beginning of the natural human being, since like the fact that we actually as humans follow religion, which is storytelling and art of storytelling, it needs to tell us something about like the importance of art. The fact that we can still until today stage Shakespeare, for example, if we're like in London and we're speaking, the fact that we

can still say Shakespeare should tell us about the fact that how art is a necessity. Or we visit museums and we look at paintings from hundred years ago. So I think this is not- to me this is not an argument, it's something necessary that we need to survive. Like it's something that it's a basic need that we need as a human being to survive. And I believe that art should be all the time centred around humans because this is the story that all the other medias does not tell us. We have the news that tell us the history or the books or the academic people that can, you know, dig deep into this and we have the socialists that can analyse it, like how this changed our human nature or whatever.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah.

Khawla Ibraheem: And arts should focus on telling the story of the human beings inside all these aspects that are around. And I think this is the art that lasts. We can still stay Romeo and Juliet because people still fall in love. And it's something very basic and it will still be relevant in 100 years from now also. So this is like, this is what we need to remember that arts and stories in theatre and in the art should be as simple as that. Two people falling in love, as a mother loving her son, as someone trying to open a coffee shop. It's like it's our day to day struggles

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Khawla Ibraheem: and feelings that we have there that needs to be centred in art.

Susan Wokoma: Absolutely. Thank you for answering that. I agree, by the way. Sometimes I ask questions, I'm like, I think it's this, but I just feel like sometimes it's just good to remind people the absolute necessity of why we're even in this room. So thank you for doing that. You've mentioned Oliver a lot. You met through the Sundance

Theatre Lab.

Khawla Ibraheem: Yeah.

Susan Wokoma: And that seems. I get really excited by partnerships and when people kind of find each other because I feel like that's the reason why I joined this industry. It wasn't just to stand on the stage and be like, look at me. It's about the partnerships. It's about the people who understand you, who push you, who make you think in a different way, and it's just really glorious. So, are there other. Before we sort of dive into you and Oliver because it's really pertinent to the production. Are there any other partnerships in your career that you feel has really, really, influenced what you write, how you write?

Khawla Ibraheem: Of course. I think, like a lot of people that I met and worked with influenced my work, to both ways. Some people I met and worked with and I was like, that's brilliant. That's exactly like where I should be aiming to. And some people, I was like, okay, this is not what I want. Yeah, I want to be.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah. Just as important.

Khawla Ibraheem: Yeah. But my relationship to Oliver and our collaboration, me and Oliver, it's something that first of all, like, lasted for long term on one project. So usually, like, you get the chance to work with, like back home, you work with someone and you work different projects together. But the different with the relationship to Oliver that we worked all this year only on this project, and it's a different, like, it taught me a different kind of, first of all, discipline as a writer. And also it got me the chance to go deeper in the material and in the way of thinking. And because also Oliver and I come from a very different background. So it also challenged me in different ways about the work. So I

would consider it like one of the most relationship that shaped the way I work now.

Susan Wokoma: I do- I have asked this to a few writers. Do you... Would you say that you are a very disciplined writer? So you have some writers who: they all have their hours. It's between this hour and this hour. I sit down, I write. I'm at my table. This is where I do it. We've also met writers who write in bed who, it takes them, you know, years and years and years. What is your kind of style of your practise?

Khawla Ibraheem: So, I'm a mixture of both. So if I have a project and I know that, like, I need to be writing, I'll be sitting and writing, within hours. Like, I would be working on a clock. I'd wake up early, I'll do my morning routine and I would get to writing. Even if I don't write a word I wouldn't like. Yeah. Even if I don't write anything, even I'm just sitting and staring at the screen. I would sit and stare at the screen from, like, for the hours that I set for myself.

Susan Wokoma: Right.

Khawla Ibraheem: And be angry with myself that I like, that I'm worth nothing and I can't do anything and everything. Yeah. It's just like, you know.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah, yeah.

Khawla Ibraheem: But also I allow myself to write in a very, like, weird moments. Like if sometimes if I'm writing and I'm on a- I'm doing a project or something, sometimes I would wake in the middle of the night, like, because I had an idea and I would just draft it and go back to sleep. So it's a mixture of two. And I think there is no one obvious answer to this. It should be like that. But you should also, like, you should also allow

yourself to write before you go to bed. And if you have an idea and you really need to write it, you should write it at that moment because otherwise in the morning you're gonna forget what even excited you about this idea.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah.

Khawla Ibraheem: But also, like, when you're not feeling that excitement where you're not feeling very creative, you should also, I think, like, you should also sit and try because, like, again, it's like the stupid idea things that you need to draught things out. Like, if you have a lot of stupid ideas, you need to write it all out until you, like,

Susan Wokoma: - you exercise out of yourself.

Khawla Ibraheem: You give some space. Yeah. Give some space for the good ideas to, To.

Susan Wokoma: Live?

Khawla Ibraheem: Live. Yeah, exactly. To live. Because you need to get rid of. It's like. It's like cleaning your house. You need to get rid of the things that you don't use in order to make space for the things that you really want to see and use daily.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah.

Khawla Ibraheem: So even when you're not writing, you need to sit there and get rid of these hours, the dry hours, in order to have some creativity flowing in.

Susan Wokoma: That's amazing. It's like really honouring those moments where nothing's coming to you, but, like, making sure that you have the nothingness.

Khawla Ibraheem: Exactly.

Susan Wokoma: Rather than even that time being.

Khawla Ibraheem: There is no way to run away from this nothing.

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Khawla Ibraheem: It's like, it's something that we all experience. And, like, I know that other writers experience, and I know that, like, even directors and actors. Like, you know, if you're an actor and you are arriving to a rehearsal and you feel tired that day, you won't wake. You won't walk away from the rehearsal after half an hour unless, like, you're very sick or something. But, like, if you're just, like, not in the mood for it today, so you don't walk away from the rehearsal after half an hour. Otherwise you're considered unprofessional, and people will reconsider working with you because you walk away whenever you don't feel like it.

Susan Wokoma: Gosh, yeah.

Khawla Ibraheem: So it's the same. It's exactly like if you're an engineer and you need to go to an office and you're just, like, you know, having a bad day or whatever. People don't walk away from what they do for a living. And the fact that as writers, we do this at home and it's, like, not an official job or. Yeah, we. Sometimes we do feel like, the, privilege of, like, we can walk away from this.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah.

Khawla Ibraheem: But actually, it's. Yeah. It's not. Doesn't work that way.

Susan Wokoma: Yeah.

Khawla Ibraheem: And if you walk away from it next time that you sit, you will still have nothing because, Yeah.

Susan Wokoma: Because you've not sat with the nothingness.

Khawla Ibraheem: Exactly.

Susan Wokoma: The agony. [Susan laughs]

Khawla Ibraheem: Exactly.

Susan Wokoma: Of, like, nothing coming to you. It's part of. It is equally as important and part of the process.

Khawla Ibraheem: Exactly.

Susan Wokoma: As when everything is flowing.

Khawla Ibraheem: Exactly. You can't have a writing process where everything is flowing. If you have this, you need to reread your script. It means there's something wrong.
[Susan laughs]

Susan Wokoma: It means there's.

Khawla Ibraheem: If you sit and you write something and it's like, it's for the entire project, everything is flowing. I would say revisit, send it. Exactly. Panic, send it to someone you trust to read it. Because I'm sure, like, 90% there will be something not good going in there.

Susan Wokoma: That's so true. [they both laugh] If it's going too well.

Khawla Ibraheem: Exactly.

Susan Wokoma: That's so true. Okay, well, we've come to the end of the episode, so I am going to ask you, how does it feel to have your play here at the Royal Court?

Khawla Ibraheem: Oh, my God. I feel. It's like a dream, honestly. Like, all this. It's like all these past two months felt for me like, very much like a dream that I'm like trying to grasp to reality and remind myself this is really happening. It's like it's something that is happening to you because it's like, yeah, it's a dream to everybody to be in this place, I think, and in a theatre that also focuses on writers and also having the opportunity to be performing my writing on the stage of the Royal Court in London. It's, yeah, it's. I'm very excited and yeah, very much looking forward to meeting the audience here and being on the stage at the Royal Court.

Susan Wokoma: Thank you so much. It's been lovely to speak to you.

Khawla Ibraheem: Thank you.

Susan Wokoma: Thank you for listening to the Royal Court Court Theatre Playwright's Podcast. If you'd like to listen to more, then make sure that you subscribe. If you're interested in what you've just heard, you can book tickets for this and other plays in the Royal Court Court's new season at, ah. Royalcourttheatre.com follow us at Royalcourt Theatre on Instagram and, [royalcourtonx](https://twitter.com/royalcourtonx). Tune in next time for another episode in this series of the Playwright's Podcast. See you soon. Goodbye.

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