JOURNEY INTO THE NEW

Guest: Dominique Serrand
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JD: I'm Joshua Dolezal, and this is Mid-Americana: Stories from a Changing Midwest. We continue our Immigration series this week with a story from Dominique Serrand. Dominique was born in France and has devoted more than forty years of his life to American theater as a director, actor, and designer. He is now Co-Artistic Director of The Moving Company, a theatre troupe based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He explained how the name of his company reflects his artistic vision and his identity as an immigrant.

DS: That idea of displacement, I think, is beautiful. To decide to displace yourself, which I was as an immigrant. I am not a refugee. I am an immigrant by choice. That makes a big difference with those who had to flee. But the fact of displacing yourself to understand how other things function, how other people think, how other cultures work is really part of my background, my pedigree, as you would say.

JD: Dominique Serrand was born and raised in Paris. He came of age during the revolution of 1968, when young people took to the streets and brought the French government to a standstill. It was an era much like our own, defined by police brutality and bloodshed on the one hand, and dreams of justice on the other.

Dominique learned as a young man to question everything. Now some critics have begun to question his methods, even his right to stage certain stories. But if conflict has brought its share of misery to Dominique's career, it has also opened opportunities. The revolution of 1968 inspired the name of his first theatre company, Teatre de la Jeune Lune, or Theater of the Young Moon. Half a century later, Dominique also sees the turmoil of our own time hopefully. As the promise of a new beginning.

JD: Dominique Serrand, welcome to Midamericana. It's a privilege to have you here.

DS: Thanks, Joshua.

JD: I wonder if you might tell me a little bit about growing up in París. What was your childhood there like?

DS: París was quite a different city than it is now. I happened to be lucky enough to be in public school to start with. For the first time in my life to be in an environment where students were my age. They came from all kinds of backgrounds. It was a great learning experience. The only time I learned it again, in a slightly different way, was when I joined − when I was drafted in the military, and I got to spend time with people who came from all walks of life. I was lucky enough to live with a family who was, from my great-grandfather, both in politics and in the arts. I got to be raised in museums and theaters. A wonderful way to be raised as a child.

JD: Tell me about your parents. You were the second of five children?

DS: Yeah. Yes. My father was in politics without ever being a politician. He was an advisor to politicians, and he created several groups, nonprofits. My mother comes from an artistic family. She herself has a bachelor in art and art history. She was very interested. Her grandfather was a poet. Her own father was a sculptor. I guess politics and arts were at the start of my life and stayed with me ever since and definitely influenced me. Particularly because my great-grandfather was the mayor of París. He was elected mayor as a poet, which is very rare nowadays. You wouldn't think a poet would become a politician. And he was mayor of París at a time during WWI, the Great War, so at a time when it was very turbulent. For me, I was raised in this environment that somehow politics and arts were lived side-by-side, and were complementary.

JD: How did you know the theatre would be your life's work?

DS: I started doing theatre with my grandmother when I was seven. She would put a tea kettle cover on our head and pretend it to be a bishop. She would make some kind of odd ceremonies. She would give us plays and say, "You don't have to do the whole play, just do the scenes you like." I was always involved in theatre. I didn't know how to do it, but I was going to the theatre a lot. I saw how it was done. I was lucky enough, even if it was very classical at times, to see the greatest artists, the most talented people, do the best work. When '68 came, everything opened up and the theatre as it was, changed drastically. It was a time you have to question the question. That was the phrase that we all used. Question the question. Not only was it just to question everything, it's about creating work. It's also about going back to the roots. The word radical, which has roots. To restudy again the great traditions of theatre. To understand them with great details, and understand how they inspire us. How do they build the pillars of an actor? How do you start? How do you get your foundations? And from that, going and creating new work.

JD: As I'm hearing that moment in time, during the cultural revolution and the revolution in theatre, *question the question, question everything*, was one of your core beliefs. Because you were questioning everything, it led you to search for your own roots, to find them for yourself. Were those the two core principles that came out of that time for you?

DS: Yes. Absolutely. Those were the two − I guess people think of it as two different roads. I tend to think of them as one builds the other in a way. Our heritage − one of our first shows was about Moliere's life because we wanted to learn our roots. What is it? How did our brothers from centuries ago, how did they live? How did they fight? What were their techniques? The name of our first company, Teatre de la Jeune Lune, Theatre of the Young Moon, was based on a Brecht poem which said, "The young moon holds the old moon all night long in its arms." Which means that the new and the old embrace each other and somehow that paved the way. I often say when I direct a Moliere piece, I'm trying to pull my ear and see that his ghost is sitting next to me, and say what would he say today? How would he change this line that he wrote years, decades, a hundred years ago? How would he change that line today? How would he make it pertinent? We had to take these ghosts around us, keep them around, keep them warm, keep them alive, and create a new work.

JD: The protests of 1968 shaped Dominique's thinking as a young man. He was anti-military, anti-establishment. But he also had a strong sense of civic duty from his father's public service. And so when he was old enough to be drafted, and his number was called, he joined the French Navy.

DS: After '68, there was still a draft in France, and so everybody had to go − every man. Women were not at the time drafted in the military. I had to go, and so I went. I actually regret and miss that time. Now that we're professional militaries, we have so many more. I believed that one of the reasons why the Vietnam War, for instance, was ended is because so many people were drafted, and their families, every family in America was more or less directly tied to that war, and their sons were there. That's why the war ended, in many ways, because of the pressure. Same in France. Anyway, I joined, and I was sent to Africa, to Somalia.

JD: Did you speak with any Somali people that you remember? Did you learn anything from people in Somalia directly during that time?

DS: I totally remember, vividly, the conversations with Somali people because we were not completely isolated. Of course, we lived in a camp. I was in the Navy. I was situated on the port. We're basically dealing with ships that arrive or were left and the port itself was basically full of Somali people who worked directly associated with shipping or with everything. I also had friends. I became friends with a bunch of them. Working around, and we had many discussions about independence. I was so naive before I came in about how things worked, and it was so clear, being there. To be on the side of the occupier.

JD: What was one thing you learned?

DS: I learned how we occupied these countries for economical reasons. I didn't know that when I was young. I didn't understand that very clearly. That's what we were doing. The military was there to enforce our economic power in those regions. Now, in terms of Djibouti particularly, the reason was also that it's across from Aden, so it's a particularly tight passage towards the Suez Canal. It was a very powerful place to be. When you see the fifth fleet, the American fifth fleet come to [city] port, the fleet itself is bigger than the port. It shows you how important those colonies were and the military might that we have over this entire region.

JD: In some ways, your military experience is tied to your theatrical sensibility. The revolutionary time you lived, it was part of what shaped you then. You came back to France after your service, and you joined the Jacques Lecoq School.

DS: That was a shock, going from military to Jacques Lecoq School. Going from the authority, where you obey, not for any reason that you understand necessarily, and you just obey because it's an order, to go to a class where you have to improvise and come up with the world and take freedom, take liberties. That was a shock. A great shock. A wonderful shock.

JD: While studying at the Jacques Lecoq School for international theatre, Dominique forged a special bond with classmates from Minneapolis, Minnesota. Together they founded Teatre de la Jeune Lune, or Theatre of the Young Moon, in 1978. The young drama company moved its

base of operations from Paris to Minneapolis in 1981 and built a reputation for excellence over the next thirty years, winning a Tony Award for Best Regional Theatre in 2005. During this period, Dominique received many other awards and fellowships and was even knighted by the French government with the Order of Arts and Letters. But the early years were hard. When he first moved to Minneapolis, Dominique shared an apartment with ten or eleven other people, and they pooled money for food, barely able to survive.

DS: The sacrifices at the beginning were huge, and it took actually a very long time. I recall that we didn't make a personal check for many years. It was very difficult. But nobody said it was going to be easy. Nobody, ever. The arts were a difficult thing to get into. They still are. We started confinement in February. Here we are, almost election day, and we still have no subsidies, no nothing. Where do the arts live? The arts is not an important thing in our society. It's difficult to be an artist. Although there are some very generous individuals and generous foundations that have always been there, extraordinary. But it's not enough. It's not sufficient.

JD: I want to take just a minute to talk about your experience as an immigrant in the Midwest and how you were received in those early days when you had a company, you had friends, you had an entry point, but within what we think of as the greater Midwest, how was that arrival for you as an immigrant?

DS: It was wonderful, in many ways. We came here because our friends brought us here. They brought us through their own friends, through their families. We were extremely well-received. I had nothing to complain. It's always the same thing when you move. For a little while, you're a tourist. You're the new guy on the corner or the new person, the new friend. Eventually, as you settle in and you start to exist within that society, you start understanding where you fit and where you don't fit. Not that it doesn't change over the years. Eventually, of course it does. But there are some fundamentals where you say, that's going to be a problem. I think if I take an example, the sense of *laicite*. I don't know what the English word is, which is so important to the French Republic. They knew that no religious belief can overcome the Republic.

JD: Secularism?

DS: Secularism. Exactly. That's the word you say. That was going to be a big problem for me, and it still is. It went through different phases, and I have some big issues with the power of religion in America.

JD: Is it fair to say that, speaking in English, I know this having lived abroad and speaking primarily Spanish, I feel like my identity is different when I'm speaking Spanish, not only do I feel less intelligent because of my limited vocabulary, but just who I come across as, my personality as expressed through Spanish is very different from how I express that in English. Is that your experience too, moving from French to English?

DS: Oh yes, very much so. Still is, today. I like to write and somehow the fact of learning to write in English was really a big issue for me. I realized very quickly how I didn't have the vocabulary I needed to have. It's interesting because after so many years in America, when I go back to France, the same thing happens in reverse in France where the language has moved, changed,

been re-influenced by its immigration population, mostly. The number of Arabic words changed into France or assimilated into French is very important. I wasn't aware. I didn't live there. The language has changed. It's a handicap both ways. But that's fine. That's part of the contradictions. I made a choice, and I have to live it and embrace those choices. The only time I suffered, once in a while you get the, "Oh, you must be French. You're so arrogant." They like that word, arrogant. When you have a different opinion, you're arrogant. God forbid that you would have a different opinion about faith. You have to understand that when you come to America, this is the most powerful country on earth. That's how you get treated in many ways. We have all the answers here. That's been part of the difficulties of regular conversations with regular folks. Maybe people don't think that way in different parts of the world. In a way for me to get to know and be friends with people who are not necessarily born here was sometimes a great relief. It felt like they're very different from me, but we have things in common. We share the same struggles. The only time I was really hurt with a figure in a stupid way was when France refused to be part of the Iraq War. Bush went out and decided we should be anti-French and anti-French fries.

JD: Freedom fries.

DS: Freedom fries. A friend of mine said, "Well, I'm not gonna freedom kiss my girlfriend."

JD: [laughs]

DS: He was a great guy. But people were violent in the street. They were pointing the finger, reminding you that we don't agree. France was right not to go to the Iraq War. Completely right. They were right because they knew, and they knew because we had in France so many Arabic friends that we knew it wasn't possible. What America was telling us was just not possible, was not. There was no way to believe it. And a reason we went is because so many Americans were behind it, because they believed what the president told them. Which was a lie. If they had known more closely more Arabic people, they would never have allowed it to happen. There's that when you're an immigrant. You have that side of it.

JD: I know you've spoken in other contexts of the nature of your work, the hours you keep, the immersion required for creative production, for writing and producing, has often kept you in solitude, and I'm imagining that because you didn't come with a community or with a family because you came as an individual, that solitude and loneliness were part of your immigrant experience.

DS: Yes. Absolutely. When you get to travel and to ask for a visa, it's very difficult to get a visa. You don't just get a visa like this. If you try to get a visa for work, it's extraordinarily difficult. Unless you're part of a very specific population that directly serves Americans' interests. Whatever it is, if it's in high technology or medicine. It's very difficult. Getting a green card to be forever and what they are requesting to obtain a green card is absolutely outrageous. I had to be on the cover of a national magazine, my picture, and we had to do this, and I had to have letters of recommendation from at least two or three or four or five major people. I had one from the governor, and I had one from a political representative of very high degree. The things you realize most people can't obtain. I was lucky that I had friends because of the theatre and board

members who helped me get through it and eventually get a green card. People don't come in this country just like that. It's just not true.

JD: It sounds like the green card process really made you feel like an outsider even after you've begun building a home in this place.

DS: I remember after I got my card, you get interviewed at the border and they ask you questions and I remember one officer asked me − all my papers were perfect. There was absolutely no question. Everything was perfect. The officer said, "Give me one good reason why I should let you in." Is that the welcome? So, it's difficult to be an immigrant.

JD: What reason did you give him?

DS: I said because I created lots of jobs, which I have. I could have said because that's my new country. But he would have said, "You're not an American citizen. What are you talking about?"

JD: What were some of your favorite memories when you were founding the Theatre de la Jeune Lune and renovating that space?

DS: There are many. There are just so many. I'll take an example. *Children of Paradise*, which was based on a film called *Children of Paradise.* The show was not the film. The show was the making of the film. It was not about the film itself, but also about the making, which was extraordinary because historically speaking, that film was made during the occupation of the Germans in France. *Children of Paradise* the film takes place in France at the time where theatres were not allowed, around the 1860s, 1840s. Theatres were not allowed, and actors were not allowed to speak on stage unless it was the official theatre. Young companies, young artists, etc. were not part of the machine, the system. They decided to create a new language, which was pantomime. They would mime the words that they were saying so that they wouldn't be caught speaking, because if they were speaking, they would be closed.

What we found out after the fact is that the film, which was made during the Nazi occupation, was dealing with all the internal problems of the occupation. Jewish people working in the film were doing it secretly under false names. People collaborated with the Nazis. So many stories of the complexity of the German occupation of France. And also the criminality of some of the French people who collaborated with Nazis. It was such a complex story. So rich in its contradictions that it needed to become a huge show, a huge piece.

We thought we had to do something epic about the history of theatre and politics and the contradictions. That not only do we have to do our art, but how do we live with all the contradictions that are around us? I think that was a big word. Contradictions. You have to live in the society you live in. At the same time, how do you fight the fight? I think it was one of the greatest qualities of the company and the work we do is to admit the contradictions of the life we live in, and to pursue the complexities.

JD: As you describe the name of your company, the young moon holds the old moon within it, it seems like that production embodies that idea.

DS: Yeah. As many did in different ways.

JD: A happy moment for you was 2005. You got a Tony Award for regional theater. What did that mean to you and your company?

DS: We got this Tony Award in 2005, and everybody was rejoicing, and we should be happy, and we said, “Wow, okay, fine, we got this.” I should have remembered what my father told me. He said, “You know, they give you medals because they don’t want to give you money.” We were really proud. Then it was the beginning of the end of everything. We started to get a lot of hate. A lot of jealousy. A lot of − everything went wrong. Those were our worst years after we got that award. It was the most difficult time we ever had. In a way, we said we should probably take that award and use it as a door stopper or something and just ignore it. But it was actually the worst gift we could get, thinking back on it. The best thing we’ve ever had was the work we did and brought and moved around the world, around the country. That was the best that we could ever have done. Always. The recompense, that was not so good.

JD: It was just three years later that Juene Lune closed its doors in 2008. What led to that decision?

DS: A lot of things. I’m not going to go back into it at length because it’s a very painful moment for me. But we basically overextended ourselves financially and we couldn’t get back on. We couldn’t save ourselves. It was the end. But in a way, it reminded us of what we said when we first started, which is we’re there to be doing the best work we can for as long as we can. There’s no point being an institution that keeps surviving just because it’s an institution. We do the work, and the day we can’t do the work anymore, we stop. Then we started this new company, which would have virtually no ambition in terms of doing something very big. It was only for its artists to continue doing the work. The artists don’t die. The artists are still there. We had big fights. We didn’t agree on where to go artistically next. That’s part of the history of it. You get to a point where you just don’t understand why you should continue doing what you’re doing. So you have to rethink. Well, again, back to the drawing board.

JD: From an outside perspective, it seems like you rallied and recovered pretty quickly, because it was the same year that Theatre de la Juene Lune closed that the Moving Company came to be and was founded.

DS: We didn’t think about reopening right away something. It was a long, difficult time, closing that theatre. It didn’t close well. It wasn’t the way it should have happened. It should have been some kind of beautiful funeral, but it didn’t happen. The dead was not buried properly. We didn’t think of starting anything right away. Along with some of my friends, 6-8 months after that, we said we have to work. We have to do the work. The fact that the theatre died doesn’t mean that the work doesn’t exist and that we don’t exist.

JD: When you Google the Moving Company, you get moving trucks, and it’s very industrial, and it’s hard to find you on the web amidst all the businesses of moving. It seems much less romantic than the idea of the young moon, and yet the idea of things moving and people being moved is still a romantic idea. Is that your vision for the Moving Company?

DS: You just said it all. It wasn't the smartest title we could think of. It came from a friend of mine, colleague, best friend, whatever, said we should go as that. And he was right. Except from a − we'd forgotten that little tiny thing that if you Google it, you get real moving companies.

JD: [laughs]

DS: We forgot. But it meant what it meant. We would be moving around because we had no room. We were not tied to a particular place. It's like displacing yourself voluntarily. That idea of displacement, I think, is beautiful. To decide to displace yourself, which I was as an immigrant. I am not a refugee. I am an immigrant by choice. That makes a big difference with those who had to flee. But the fact of displacing yourself to understand how other things function, how other people think, how other cultures work is really part of my background, my pedigree, as you would say. Is that the word?

JD: Sure.

DS: Like on a dog. Where I come from. Tied to my neck. Wanting to go and sniff other territories and see how they function and how they work. It's part of the curiosity.

The work. The creation. The new. That's what we do.

JD: The journey.

DS: The journey into the new. How do we address this? We're in such a tribal period where everybody has their own culture and right to speak of something. For us, it doesn't fit what we've been doing and what we've been searching, which is exploding things that we don't know. We're the storytellers of stories that are not necessarily ours. Which is a really, really difficult subject to approach right now. We, as actors, play characters that we're not. That's what we do. We tell stories that are not ours as actors. That's who we are. That's what we do.

JD: That's what you were setting out to do in *Refugia.* You began writing that work in 2015, and you were inspired largely by the Syrian crisis, is that right?

DS: Yes, that's correct. Absolutely. The idea of *Refugia* didn't come to us as something we wanted to do. Let's have an idea and do a show about refugees. No. We're about to do a show about a very famous German actress and singer who came to America. On our way to go workshop this in Texas at the University of Austin Texas, a beautiful place. I think half a million refugees cross the border from Syria into different countries, mostly Turkey. We said, we can't do this show about this German artist who we loved. We have to do a show about this. People just got taken out of their place and got bombed out and the proportion of this exile is just gigantic. We couldn't believe it. Not that we weren't used to it. We were used to it. We'd seen Cambodian refugees and refugees from around the world. But it was never to that extreme where we said we have to do a show about refugees. We worked at the University of Austin on that theme and it was a beautiful experience, developing this work.

JD: In one scene, *Refugia* follows Syrian refugees across the border into Turkey, then through Turkey to the Mediterranean Sea. Then the perilous journey by boat to Greece, and thousands

of miles on foot across Europe. The show dramatizes other border crossings, past and present. One scene shows a young girl detained at the Arizona border, separated from her family and denied the simple courtesy of a drink of water by the border agents. Another features a Jewish couple stopped by Communist soldiers as they try to cross from Eastern Europe into Israel. They are composers, carrying sheet music in their suitcases, but they write by numbers rather than notes, and so they are accused of espionage and stealing military secrets.

As *Refugia* moved back to Minneapolis, the team added new scenes. Some are based on true stories, featuring Algerian refugees fleeing to France. Others are metaphorical or poetic, like a scene in which a dancer emigrating from Africa crosses paths with a polar bear, a climate refugee.

I asked Dominique how audiences first responded to *Refugia*.

DS: It was for a great part very beautifully received. We had very, very beautiful reception, and the number of people who wrote to us was quite stunning, and wrote to the theatre. And some of the best, most beautiful letters we got were from refugees. They were just blown away. Not forgetting the fact that a lot of them – we made ourselves available after the show so people could see us and talk to us. The number of people who came to us and – I remember a Palestinian refugee family was just so moved, and on and on. So many.

JD: It also stirred up some controversy –

DS: It did.

JD: – in reviews, and I know there were concerns about actors wearing fat costumes or padding that raised questions about body representation. I think there were questions about characters of color: whether they should be played by actors of color.

DS: Yes. There was. We witnessed that. We listened to it. That was a time of great listening for us to say what have we done? Have we offended anyone? How did we do so? The seven lead characters were playing all the parts. They had to change aspects and look different. One of the women – actresses who played in the show decided that she wanted to look bigger, so she asked that we build her a larger, something that's a suit that made her look bigger. People complained. It wasn't an attempt for us to make fun of anything or anyone because of their shape. It was just for an actor to be able to portray someone in a different way and to be able to appear different. That's part of what the theatre can do. In terms of the acting, it was true that the company was too small. You couldn't fill all the parts of all the scenes according to race or color. But the cast was principally non-white. We had a multiethnic cast, and it was hurt, profoundly hurt by the attacks that were made.

JD: I read in one review that the scene at the Arizona border with these government law enforcement officers and this young girl who's denied a drink of water and I think stuffed in a trash can at some point in the scene, there was laughter produced by the scene and this particular reviewer felt uncomfortable by the laughter and sort of felt like the scene was the problem.

DS: I think we're living in a very sensitive time where people are very easily hurt or they feel like it's about them. We're all so divided, more than ever known in my entire life, and so the show was on a country based on the idea of reuniting. Of these people somehow get to move and get accepted and get to find a place. We didn't want to do it in a very serious way all the time. We had some profoundly tragic scenes. Some very moving scenes. That particular scene in Arizona was about the border patrol, basically. So of course there was this young woman, this young girl, who wanted − it's not funny at all. But the border patrol, we decided to do it like buffoon characters. They were horrifyingly stupid. They were dangerously stupid. The point was to make the audience laugh. That was calculated. That was exactly the point − to push to make sure the audience would laugh at the stupidity of this horrifying thing. Which we know is horrifying. In other scenes in the country, the violence was so powerful on the stage and it spoke for itself. We wanted the audience to get on a ride, a difficult, complicated ride where they had contradictory feelings thrown at them. The point was pretty clear, that we were on the side of refugees and on the side of all refugees. That was clear. What was questioned was did I have the right as a white person to speak stories that were not part of my culture as a white person. And I get scared when I hear that proposition. When I hear the idea that someone is not allowed to speak about something. I get scared. I get very nervous. When a company like us, a company of artists, puts together the greatest cast possible, multiethnic cast, to play a story that takes place over many countries, many cultures, we're doing the right thing. That's my opinion.

JD: You seem to respond in some way to those controversies or critiques in your next production, *Speechless*. There are no spoken words in those stories, and since we in this podcast rely only on sound, I wonder if you could capture some of the images that are speechless but convey meaning.

DS: What happened was *Refugia* was supposed to tour and a lot of people were really excited about it. When the controversy about some of the casting − the controversy by the press relied on the press. Happened that the show was cancelled touring. Which was profoundly sad. It was the saddest thing for us. Taking the criticism, we did, but it was profoundly sad because it was a gorgeous piece for refugees and on behalf of refugees. Suddenly, we're off our horse. We had this beautiful piece, but it wasn't going to go anywhere. We didn't know what to do. We were also paralyzed for a while. Maybe we're not allowed to speak about anything. Maybe I'm not, being a white man. And old. And we say, while we're going to do a show, we're going to do a show where we have nothing to say. Nothing any longer to say. There was *Speechless*. It was in response to this accusation we had. How did the show work? It worked on scenes. It was based on a funeral. The beginning was a funeral. You don't start a show with a funeral. That's not the way to start a show. Basically, it was putting the ashes into a vase, and the ashes were hope's ashes. It was hope that was being put into the ground. That's how we started the show. Every scene was a moment in life where − it was all about things that break your heart. Things that broke, constantly broke, and you spent your time just putting it back together. It was a whole scene was plates just breaking and we'd put the pieces back together and try to have dinner with broken plates. It went on and on till the end.

JD: There were comedic elements woven in. Weeping and laughter at the same time.

DS: Yes. Absolutely. With the show, we tried to do what we do best, which is to do the best work we can.

JD: Well, I have not been able to see *Speechless* performed live, unfortunately, because of the COVID restrictions. There's a beautiful final scene with these ashes. They're colored ashes.

DS: The ashes start being just ashes, and magically as we manipulate them, put them in our hands and use them to draw on the floor they turn and become colorful ashes.

JD: It's like a sand painting at the end.

DS: Yes. Exactly.

JD: What did you hope for that to communicate? From the funeral to the colorful sand painting.

DS: That if hope is not back, you can grow it again. It's like feels, it's something you see a lot, much more in the far east. There are different ways, and I happened to live in a small region in France where I was born where they actually do this same thing, which is unbelievable because it's an Asian idea. In France, it's been their tradition since the medieval times where they color sawdust and then they make all these patterns and you walk on them. It's a procession. It's a religious procession around Easter, but I believe it's a recreation by the Catholic church of a pagan long tradition. How does this little village in western France get somehow tied in with the same gesture of color and sawdust as celebrations in India? That's fascinating. To me, that's really what I want. That's what I want to see. That's a beautiful ending.

JD: I know that you feel now is the time for a wild opera. Why is that, and what kind of opera would you want to produce, or are you producing now?

DS: No. To be quite honest, I don't have the money to produce a wild opera. It's in my brain. I think we need to, especially after this pandemic, we're going to need to get out and scream for a very long time. That scream better be a beautiful, beautiful song. I don't know what shape it will take or how it will happen, but the largest celebration needs to happen when this is finally, maybe not over, but at least when we know how to live with it in a way that is not just killing us like it is right now. I also need to add one thing, is that I'm profoundly moved by the idea and by the time I've been spending here in my community in Minneapolis and the United States. There's a lot of wrong that needs to be changed, but this is a country that can and is being grown on change. On the power of change. Right now, it's a difficult, difficult time that we need to regain the power to change and to move forward. I'm glad to have been part of it. I will continue to be part of it.

JD: Thanks for listening to Mid-Americana. And we're grateful to Dominique for sharing his story.

Next time, Brian speaks with Irene Ernest, a community health worker with the Pacific Islander Health Project in Dubuque, Iowa. Irene serves others like her who have migrated to the Midwest from the Marshall Islands. And she describes some of the challenges facing the islands, including health and environmental problems caused by US nuclear testing and the increasing

impacts of sea level rise and climate change. Join us to hear about her efforts to provide healthcare, education, and opportunity to the growing community of Marshallese in the US.

You can find transcripts and show notes on our website, midamericana.com, which includes original illustrations for each episode by Mathew Kelly. If you like our show, please rate and review us on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen. Dominique Serrand's story was produced by me and Brian Campbell and edited by Brad Linder. Special thanks to David Barasoain for his support. Music for this episode was written and produced by Adam Bruce.

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