

JOURNEY INTO THE NEW

Guest: Dominique Serrand
Interviewer: Joshua Dolezal

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[Audio technicalities discussion, 0:00-3:37]

JD: Excellent. How are you?

DS: Considering everything, I'm still okay. Yesterday, I had a really hard day.

JD: Oh.

DS: With the confirmation of the supreme court justice.

JD: Yes.

DS: Sunday, I realized, in a more vivid way, what could be changed in our future. It's frightening.

JD: Do you feel like we're living in a more extreme time politically even than when you came in in the 1980s?

DS: Oh, absolutely. We've gone so far to the right. It's unbelievable. The power of the religious right is unbelievable. I didn't fathom it could ever be this – we're back 80 years at least.

JD: I've sort of wondered if it's longer –

DS: America is definitely, yesterday, signed out of being one of the great leaders and a progressive investment of democracy in the world. They signed it off. That's it.

JD: Mhmm. I remain hopeful that after November 3rd, we'll have something to celebrate. But as you say, a lot of damage has been done.

DS: I agree with you. And I think that maybe it's time that the supreme be considered not as supreme justice of the country any longer. Since it's not.

JD: I want to come back to some of those themes, because last time we spoke, we were comparing 1960s culture with the present time.

DS: Yep, yeah, totally.

JD: I'm going to begin the interview with our first chapter origins. Your childhood. And we'll come back up to the present. I'll ask a small favor. If you could, as much as possible, pretend that we've never spoken before, our listeners will never have heard our previous conversation, so, as much as possible, I will try to avoid referring back to insider knowledge between us. If you can do the same, I would be grateful.

DS: Certainly.

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 Paris. What was your childhood there like?

DS: Paris was quite a different city than it is now. It was a much more populous, much more low wage workers. A really working class city, in many ways, with its wealthy neighborhoods. Vibrant city of workers. 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. Paris was an extraordinary city because of its background, its history. I'm not referring to the touristic side of it, but to the profound historic side of the city. I have the same feeling in Paris as I have when I visit Washington, DC in some ways. It's where the fundamental places exist, museums, places where the Constitution – I know it's in Philadelphia – some of the really powerful pillars of our society live. In cities like Paris or Washington. So it has that. 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. And of course, 1960 happened when I was quite young.

JD: How old were you when – ?

DS: 17.

JD: 17. Okay. So, keeping our earlier focus, 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. I don't know how you refer to them nowadays, but they were basically groups of inhabitants in a district, in a neighborhood, groups of associations, that's what they're called in French, of cities and neighborhoods to take care of the own advancement of your own cities. He was very, very involved.

JD: Was that work that we might understand as socialist work?

DS: No, because he wasn't a socialist at all. I think he was more of a philosopher. He was away directly from particular politics or particular groups. Being a former resistant and working for the resistance in France, he was involved in politics very early on without ever running himself for elections. He wasn't interested in that. 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 Paris. 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 Paris at a time during WWI, the Great War, so at a time when it was very turbulent. He had these responsibilities that were very

great. His son was a sculptor, as I just mentioned. For me, I was raised in this environment that somehow politics and arts were lived side-by-side, and were complementary.

JD: You're the only one of your siblings to have left France. At least that was true earlier in your life.

DS: Yes.

JD: Are you also the only of your siblings to have pursued a career in the arts?

DS: No, I'm not, actually. My older brother is a photographer. He worked a lot in fashion for a long time. He did a lot of his own work for himself. He worked for Vogue magazine and all kinds of famous work, and I assisted him in the beginning. Our grandfather on the other side was a photographer himself, so he inherited this talent, and it gave me a taste for photography, which I continue to have today. I take lots of pictures although I don't consider myself to be a photographer. My sister had a career more in – she's a political science person and did a lot of work in the administration in the department of health. She ventured and became a producer in different ways. Not films, but other things. Very talented. The second one is a composer. My second sister is a composer, and she works in France and she works also in the Czech Republic. I've worked with her in San Francisco on a production. My younger brother now is in charge of the repair and fixing of all monuments in western France and the funding of all historical monuments. He's in charge of the repair of the Cathedral of Norte, which just burned and had a terrible fire this summer. An eclectic group of people. We get along quite well.

JD: Leading up to 1968 as you were coming of age in school, that was an authoritarian kind of time, in other European countries perhaps more so than France, but the establishment that was challenged and overthrown later on was the establishment you grew up in, yet it seems you had freedom to express yourself in the arts. Can you describe your experience as a student? Some of the frictions you faced, as well as the freedoms you enjoyed?

DS: I never suffered really greatly from anything because I lived in a good environment. I was lucky to have really good teachers who like the arts, took us to the theatre. It was a very good time. We went to the theatre regularly. We were taken as a class. Teachers took us. We saw beautiful productions and very strong productions. Very controversial at times. I don't think you'd see a teacher nowadays who'd have the freedom to take their students to see a controversial production. My teachers did. In that sense, for me, the leading to '68 was not a great struggle. It was life as it was. I was lucky to be in a great environment. What happened with '68 was more shock and a learning curve where I learned how deeply in France things functioned, which I was not aware of. It was a great learning curve. That happened so quickly. Everything happened in a few weeks. Tons of information was thrown at us. We realized how the power worked, and there was something also so stunningly attractive from the theatrical standpoint. To remember that two theatres, one in particular, the [French name], which is another theatre of Europe, was the center of the movement in 1968. The Latin district was closed off. But the theatre itself was a stage for the revolution. People would come and speak. It was a way to see great theatrical directors and playwrights come up and denounce their own work and say it was the old times. They came and said, "Don't do my plays anymore. They're old fashioned. They're part of the

past.” Numerous people said it was also an exercise in theatre and questioning the theatre. The prop departments were devastated. People would take props and use them as weapons, which allowed one of my friends who was in school with me from Harvard, and it was a study in people’s movement in revolutions. What worked for the CIA came back and said the movement is romantic. It will never come to anything serious or violent. The way they throw stones is romantic. It was a very powerful way to enter into late adolescence and the beginning of my career as a young artist. I didn’t even dare calling myself an artist at the time. I was a worker in the arts. A worker in the theatre. I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I knew I was very interested in acting and had done a lot. But by the time I was 18, I had been in one company, which was not mine, created two, one after the other. I was very invested to the art of theatre, not knowing what’s supposed to become. Only that it had to move, it had to change, it had to become something new.

JD: Before that, when you were still a student in school, how did you know the theatre would be your life’s work? Or did you not know that? Before you attended the Jacques Lecoq School –

DS: Sorry to interrupt. Everything I just described was even before Jacques Lecoq School. That was my youth. 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. Everybody basically thought – I should say that in a different way. It was a time you have to question the question. That was the phrase that we all used. Question the question. 1968 movement was a profoundly poetic movement. The posters were beautifully coiled. The expressions under the pavement, the pavement represented the labor, the hard work, the hardship of life. You had posters that say “Under the pavement, the beach.” The work developed around ‘68 was extraordinary. Really stunning.

JD: I might just ask briefly, your grandfather, or great-

DS: Great-grandfather.

JD: The poet mayor, reminds me of Valclav Havel, who was a philosopher and minister. Was Havel instrumental in that time period, or was he later?

DS: Havel was still in jail. We, as theatres, together formed a union that was parallel to the human rights of theatre, of the arts. We were defending and helping the cause of great artists who were arrested. Havel was one of them. Eventually, all of us artists who participated in that time were sending postcards to the president of Slovakia at the time and got him released. He eventually became the president. That came directly out of 1968 where theatres were responsible in front of the whole society. So a few names came up. Of course, Aria Mushkin was a great leader, who probably was the most successful theater in France. The most beautiful, stunning, hopeful theater. The time was to question what we are doing. What society

do we want? What does that mean in terms of theatre? What is the theatre that we want? My encounter with Jacques Lecoq was both. 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.

25:33

JD: As I've heard you in other contexts speak about your work, I know that Minnesota has been important to you because of the need for roots when you bought your building for Teatre de la Lun, you talked a lot about roots then. As I'm hearing that moment in time, during the culture 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. The history of theatre, the journeys the theatre has made over centuries, whether you look at Moliere, it was, besides being what people look at as a comic writer, was principally somebody who was questioning society in a profound 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? And to build some kind of, not only a history for ourselves, but also create a new discipline. What are our reference points? How do we move from yesterday from today? How would they have done it? How do we do it now? Nothing is completely abstract. It's all based on history and of course our personal lives. Adventure. Our personal journey. It's a word I use a lot: journey. In homage to Jacques Lecoq who used to say everything moves, that's what I do. It's not because one morning I decide I want to do something new, which can happen, but it's because things do move. It's for me to stay alert as they move and stay with them and journey with them. They move whether I like it or not. They move whether I think of them or not.

JD: You've just shed some light on a later question about the name of your current theatre company. I'm assuming it has some roots then with Jacques Lecoq.

DS: Yes, absolutely.

JD: Well, I'll save that for later, if we might.

DS: I must say the name of our first company, as a well known company, the one I spent 30 years with, 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. How we were going to choose the next work. It was always because of what happened around us. If I may, the base of the first years' work was Moliere because we wanted to go back and study and rediscover a man who was so

stunningly beautiful, wrote so well, was such a great actor, and who spoke so well at his time. It was an example. We kind of said, now we're on our own. Let's abandon him, let's keep him in mind. I often say when I direct a Moliere piece, I'm trying to pull my ear and see his ghost 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. What's that going to be? A good example of a work based on the moment was during the election of Reagan, who was this buffoon actor, very smart obviously, who became the president. It was during the election. Let's write a new piece that's called Oovoo for President, the guy who pretends like he's actually running for election. We know what that is today when I mention it. Oovoo for president.

JD: Right. [laughs] Well, help me understand the timeline between your time at the Jacques Lecoq School and your time in the Navy. Which came first?

DS: The Navy came first. 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. Although I was particularly [unclear] military, I could have dodged the draft by saying I was [unclear] military. Then they usually didn't like those kinds of people. They'd say, "Just don't do it." With some repercussions, probably. I did do it, I wanted to do like everyone else. I wanted to just see what it was like. 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. That was also a learning curve, to be part of the colonials movement, the French colonials movement. And being there and although I never did anything that I could reproach myself – I never had any contact directly with the war of independence. It kind of happened on its own. That's a different story that I could talk at more length about.

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 the, 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 grew very strongly – I learned. 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 [city] particularly, the

reason was also that it's across from Adan [?], 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 street 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. I learned a lot. I could give many details, but that's not the purpose of our discussion here, I think.

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: Am I right that at Jacques Lecoq you met the colleagues you would later start *Theatre de la Jeune Lune* with? Was it there that you forged your friendship?

DS: Yes. It was very much in the spirit of Jacques to say you have to build, you have to create companies. You have to work together. You have to work, instead of shaping individuals, which is done, it has a whole series of individual actors and writers and directors, designers, came out and did the work – a lot of companies were created and that was directly out of the movement of '68 and even Rushkin came and said "I'd like to work for you." I said, "You have to create your companies." We did. Those friends, many friends, some of them lasted not very long. We just joined as a company, formed a company, and some of them left and went to other companies or to their own work. But it was the first tryouts. It was very profoundly – it was the nature of the work. You had to do it with other artists. Create a community. Hard. It's hard to do.

JD: Yeah. Who were some of those two or three people from Minnesota? I think some of them, Barbara Barovitz might have been one of them –

DS: Yes, Barbara and I were both from the school, the same year. Barbara and I did work before we started the company. Because of them, we naturally visited the United States and Minneapolis since they were from Minneapolis. Eventually, we decided that this was a place to live. It was a big step. It was a very big step.

JD: What was it about their artistic vision that made you such good collaborators?

DS: I think I can't really speak of them as them. I have to speak of them individually. Barbara was a very strong personality. She is still very present in the theatre. She works a lot with universities. She was very interested in the educational part of it. We had worked together individually and we thought that we had many things in common. Bob was not in the same year as we were, but obviously was an old friend of Barbara from before, and he was a remarkable, very funny character. He was his own brain, his own mind, his own way of thinking that was really fantastic. We each had different talents. Different forms of talents. That's what made our strength. We're not the same. Which is great. And it's very much understanding in the construction of Jacques Lecoq School, of wanting to have actors from around the world. I can't

remember exactly how many countries were represented in the year I was in, but many. It was fantastic to work with people who came from such different backgrounds, such different cultures. Theatre goes beyond us to explode, not ignore, but on the contrary, recognize and embrace those differences that we have. Same within the small groups we formed, each of us, were made of individuals who each had their own talent, their own characters, their own specialty, their own background.

JD: What you describe sounds really the opposite of what now are called affinity groups, which are groups of people like oneself, which is how we seem to organize ourselves on social media and other ways. It sounds like your philosophy then at the Jacques Lecoq School was really the opposite of an affinity group. You wanted a group with people who were not like you.

DS: Yes. I mean, there was affinity in the sense that we had things in common. We had fights, we fought well. But we had ideals that we shared. One of them was to obey the societies we lived in and to make sure that those societies were fairer to everyone and more opened. It wasn't a simple time. It was a complicated time. Not the moment, I'm not talking about the year, but the decade was complicated. We had basically ended the colonies in Nigeria and were in the midst of ending a lot of colonies in Africa, and it was going to be a long, long haul. How would that relationship continue to be? We had lots of refugees from Algeria, Morocco, and other African countries, because of course different regimes, as soon as the colonies were ended, the regimes were not necessarily democratic regimes. There was a lot of infighting within those societies. So, France received thousands and thousands of refugees. Let me rephrase this. We had to become the recipient of refugees from all these former colonies, people who had been participating and had collaborated with France as an occupier, but anyway, they needed a place. France took all these refugees. Because of all the internal wars and civil wars, France took in more and more refugees. Suddenly, we were confronted with how we were going to coexist. How was that going to function together. That was just the beginning. We didn't have the answers. We just knew we had to ask the question. We had to figure out how this was going to work. While a portion of the country was already decided that we didn't want those people. They were the outsiders. Anything new? [laughs]

JD: Sounds quite familiar. You, shortly after your time at the Jacques Lecoq School, became an immigrant yourself, and with these colleagues from Minnesota. You'd been traveling, so you'd already been to the US and grew comfortable with that area, but tell me about your decision to leave France and set up a new theatre company in Minneapolis. How did that happen?

DS: It was difficult. It wasn't an easy move to do. We're going back and forth, and eventually, the system in France was such that you had to invite the officials of the Minister of Culture to come and visit you on a yearly basis and see what progress you made, and they would decide if you were to receive a larger subsidy. We moved up, but we got to a point where it was obvious it was slow, and that we're not going to get the support in France that we needed. Minneapolis looked like a stronger prospect. For many reasons. It was also a very nice environment. It was cheaper. Imagine rehearsing in Paris. It's very expensive. It's like New York. It's outrageous. For a young company of young performers who create their own company to create their work and try to present it, Minneapolis was ideal as any city that was not overly big, where rent was

affordable, would have been preferable to any big city like Paris or New York. That was the choice we made. We realized later it actually hurt us, in many ways, not to be in a major city because critics were not going. They were not traveling. Buyers were not traveling to cities that were not part of the major cities. There were ups and downs. The ups were that we did fabulous work because we could. The downs were that the work was not necessarily seen as well as it could have been if we were in larger cities.

JD: Later, you would take your work on the road. You would work in Stanford and Yale and take residencies overseas with other institutions, so you were able to be seen in other contexts eventually, but initially, you felt like Minneapolis was, to some extent, the stereotype of the Midwest as a backwater or cultural blank spot on the map.

DS: It's a great place to get the work done. Our own space, which we built based on our thoughts – I should rephrase that. We're very lucky to be able to develop a beautiful space and warehouse into a very opened space for the theatre that we're making, but probably wouldn't have been able to do something like that if I'd been in New York or a big city. We're very lucky. Gorgeous space. Probably one of the most exciting spaces in the country. We're very lucky. So we did build a foundation, a strong foundation, an audience and supporters, and the work got done, which is extraordinary.

JD: I heard you tell someone years ago that the first two years were hell. You were living 11, 12 people in an apartment, sharing money for food. So there was a lot of sacrifice that went into that vision initially.

DS: The sacrifices at the beginning were huge, and it took actually a very long time. It was much more than two years actually if I recall correctly. Maybe my memory's wrong, but it was much longer. 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. 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. Artists don't do very well. It's very unknown. We're lucky to have had the path that we had. We're lucky to somehow have been where we've been. But it's been hard. It's been very difficult.

JD: What were some of your favorite memories when you were founding the Theatre de la Jeune Lune and renovating that space? What was a moment or two you recall from working with your friends and colleagues to make that space beautiful that was really unforgettable to you?

53:44

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. The film was made during that occupation. It was politically [?] and poetically [?]. It was a big show. It was a great cast. The show went lots of places. It opened our space, which the work had just been done. That's a memory that will stay with me forever. But many, many shows gave me the greatest pleasure. They were always accompanied by great difficulty. Great hardship. It's a lot of work. People don't realize how much. How difficult it is to be doing what we do, and how difficult it is to get to a success. One successful show represents so much work. So much work. I'm so lucky and so thankful.

JD: Can you offer a brief synopsis of *Children of Paradise* for those unfamiliar with it?

DS: *Children of Paradise* the film takes place in France at the time where theatres were not allowed, around the 1860s, 1840s. Am I right? I might be wrong. But 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. The *Children of Paradise* is basically the story during this very dire moment in history in France between the official theatres and the actors. The pantomime artists were not allowed to speak. All that takes places on a famous boulevard in Paris. It's about theatre but also about crime, it's about society at large, it's about jealousy, it's about everything. It's an absolutely superb film. 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.

JD: In 1992, that's when you produced it, you had the original context of the theatre at the time that the film was set, you had the WWII era of the film making, and the secrecy required there. What was it about 1992 where you were listening to the ghosts of those earlier eras and trying to speak something to that present moment through this production?

DS: I don't think 1992 was specifically tied to the show itself. I think it was more because it was such an event to open our space after decades of doing work. 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? How do you bring up in the work the upheavals and great difficulties and deal with it and advance? At the same time, you have to sell tickets and you have to make some money. You have to pay your people. Oddities, complexities, and contradictions are the center of the work. I don't think they ever left us. 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. I shouldn't say glorify – that's not the right word – but to reset as an example the fact that you have to fight, and you have to accept the contradictions. Your own contradictions.

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 in different ways.

JD: Maybe I'll ask you quickly about *Tartuffe*, a production you returned to in 1999. I'm curious how you –

DS: Absolutely. If I recall correctly, Congress turned Republican in 1994, if I'm correct. But anyway, at the time, the certain amount of very extreme right Senators and House members decided that somehow art was tied to pornography. It was a big deal. A lot of artists were basically crucified by those. We suddenly saw this idea going backwards that art and pornography were to be – We suddenly realized that our work was tied to pornography, which was unbelievable. And we said, "Now is the time to do *Tartuffe*. We have to do this play." Which made sense at the time. Moliere wrote it against a very powerful religious right. Now there's a reason to do it. There was not any reason before, but now there was a reason to do it.

JD: What was Moliere's moment that he was responding to?

DS: People don't realize, but the religious in France were as powerful as the king. Basically, the king had to share power with the religious, which was at the time the Catholic religion. Moliere at the time was making fun of people and the religious right, and the religion was fighting and basically trying to get the king to stop giving him money and supporting him. Eventually, in *Tartuffe*, he showed a fake devout, basically. A religious man who pretends to be more religious than God to tell us how we should behave. That's what the far right in America was doing. They were more religious than God. They were telling us that we can't do this, we can't do that. We just put up a supreme court justice who is going to take us back 80 years, who will represent the religious right. For us to choose a play, we had to find a common denominator. Something that brought us either back in history or somehow told us this play should be remounted. Now it makes sense. It has echoes today. That was the case with *Tartuffe*. Still does.

JD: Right. I want to continue with your more recent work with *Refugia* and *Speechless* in particular. 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 [French word]. 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. I was well received. I also welcomed the fact that there was so many – it was a great shock when you arrive in America. It's a country of immigrants. You don't realize that when you've lived in France. It's changed now, but from my generation, you arrive and there are people from everywhere. It's fantastic. It's amazing, in many ways.

JD: I'm curious if you've reflected on your experience as a white immigrant compared to what you've observed from people of color or the Somali community, the Syrian community, and Hmong refugees have also come to the Twin Cities – how your experience was different from theirs?

DS: It was very different. First, I came as an individual along with my friends. I didn't come with a family. I didn't come to the United States to move. I don't have that experience. It's very, very different. As a result, I didn't also move to a particular community. A lot of my friends have moved to certain communities. The Hmong community moved to particular neighborhoods where the community was. That wasn't my case. I didn't move to a French community within the United States. Actually, for a long time, I refused to do that. I said, I'm living in the states. It's different. It's a different system, a different life, a different community, and I have to learn how to live with those differences. I don't have that particular – Have I suffered from it? Yes, I have at times.

JD: I'm so sorry, but you're bumping the microphone.

DS: Oh, I'm sorry.

JD: Thank you.

DS: I've suffered from it at times in my profession because of my accent. A lot of casting – I couldn't do a lot of casting work and people would not consider me for parts because of the accent. I suffered, and it was huge. But that continues to be a question.

JD: Is it fair to say that, speaking in English, I know the setting, 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 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. Yes, you can pass the border in the south, but the reason you pass the border is because we need people to pick up our fruits and vegetables. That's why they pass the border. Because we need them to get through the border. That's what it is. That's what it's always been. So, some people do it illegally, but most, if you're really looking, most people don't pass the border illegally. They stay illegally. They stay longer than they're supposed to. You don't have to invite them in the first place if you didn't want them. But if you wanted them, because you need them to live, to pick your fruits and your vegetables and do the work, do everything you need, then you might as well have a place for them to live.

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?" He coined a whole discourse about immigration and that this is a country of immigrants. That's what it is. A lot of people were persecuted coming here because they were persecuted. Everyone knows that. Then you have, and I don't need to go into it now because that's not my information to speak, but we know people didn't immigrate here. They were brought in by force. And we still have that problem to deal with. We still have that community we just don't want to deal with. I wish we did.

JD: Shifting back to Juene Lune, 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: That's a really good – I'm glad you brought this up because it was – maybe I should rephrase this. 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. I don't know what happened to it, by the way. I think the University of Minnesota must have 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 home. The result is that because of the financial stress and the difficulties, we couldn't make the artistic decisions that were necessary at the time to save ourselves. So, we made a lot of bad decisions. I made some poor decisions and some bad decisions. 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. They change, they move, they do different things. 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. And earlier you described movement as part of your roots at the Jacques Lecoq School. Was I right in thinking that was part of your roots that you were still holding onto with that name?

DS: Absolutely. 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 [sic] 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. That's where the lie came from. There is a history in America of supporting brick and mortar, but the necessity of artists still doesn't exist. It's still not part of the culture. Forgetting that it's the artists who make the art. That's why the famous foundation called USA, United States Artists, got created – to remind people that art is made by artists. If you want art, you have to support artists. You have to support the artists while they are alive in the ways of giving them money so they can feed themselves and so they can produce a work that they only know how to produce.

JD: That's been a struggle for you from day one in Minnesota, hasn't it?

DS: Already where I wouldn't be. It's always a problem. The ups and downs and ups and downs. You never give up. You just keep doing the work.

JD: Well –

DS: Do you want me to expand on that?

JD: I'm wanting to talk about the name a little more, because 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. The theatre where we were supposed to be moving. It was the right title. It was just one of those.

JD: It is an older tradition in drama, isn't it, to have a kind of itinerant or mobile troop of sorts. It seems like you're modeled after something more from the Renaissance period maybe.

DS: Yeah, and that's how we started with Juene Lune. We started to be moving and with the companies that formed in France years before, we basically existed by touring. Going through France. I remember when I was quite young, I can't remember the exact year, but one of the tours we organized was a company in France before I went to Jacques Lecoq. We went and we visited all the places Moliere had toured. We played in every city he had gone to because we wanted to know where he was from and what it felt like and the culture. 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. I wasn't there 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. 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. We live in a difficult time now because of the pandemic of course. It's been devastatingly cruel to the entire artistic world. The fact that even before we had the pandemic for a very long time the artistic world was not profoundly exciting. Because why? BEcause society doesn't expect anything profound from it. Because the artisans have to find the resource among themselves to create the work. One of the things that we must remind ourselves for me and my colleagues is that some of the strengths of the works we've done is the creation work, not just the plays, the beautiful plays. That we had such a pleasure going back and getting excited to revisit. But 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 if *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. Like a lot of shows, the actors came from Congress turning Republican and trying to associate artists with pedophiles or whatever they decided to do, this demented far right. We did *Tartuffe* the same thing. 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: What were some of the chapters or scenes that you developed there in Texas?

DS: We started with the refugees from Syria, basically following their journey. Not just across the border in Turkey, but basically you – maybe we don't have time to talk about this in details, but you have basically the exiles who move from the northern part of Syria into Turkey, and from then which is a long journey through Turkey to the Mediterranean. To the islands that are close. Some are close by under six miles. Some are further away. People go by boats. Then they're in Greece, which means they're in Europe. And from then on they start the long journey. Then you have the northern route, where they go directly through basically walking, it's unbelievable, walking through Greece and the northern and entering into the rest of Europe through Serbia and other countries like Austria, and eventually to Germany, France, and through France to England. But it's thousands and thousands of miles walking. The journey by sea is horrendous. Thousands of people have perished from the beginning of time. We looked into it there with great journalistic work. Great accounts and accounts from how they passed to how they paid. People were making profit getting those people across the water. We're fascinated. That was a huge route. Iraqi, Syrians, –

JD: You had other scenes in the production from earlier in history from the Arizona border.

DS: We did have several scenes because from the very beginning what we thought about was this is a theatrical piece. We're not doing a piece just about Syrian refugees going, which we could have done, but that wasn't the choice. The choice was to do refugees in the past, and one

of the scenes was a couple who came from the eastern block and basically were trying to cross to go to Israel. It's all based on their music. They were carrying their music in their suitcases. Because they were not writing the music by notes, but by numbers. It was thought at the border they were spies and trying to export military secrets. It's a true story. It's just a composer going to Israel. We titled these different stories. It was a long work trying to say how we bring Arizona the story of this kid who crossed the border with his family and this kid was arrested at the border and detained.

JD: A young girl?

DS: Yeah. She was detained in a horrible way. Before Trump, when the families got separated in a horrible way. The show was there to try to celebrate the spirit of those people who go through these absolutely horrendous experiences and somehow have the power to stay alive to continue to have hope for themselves and for their friends. Very often, they travel together. The show was made of all these different scenes. It was a beautiful piece. It came to us not by choice, it just arrived in the middle of our thoughts, and we pursued it. I'm so grateful to the students and the staff at University of Austin who helped us put this piece together and eventually the Guthrie Theatre that decided to produce it. We made it a longer piece, adding refugees from Algeria to France, part of my culture.

JD: Is that later stage a creation when the polar bear and the dancer appeared?

DS: Yeah. It was more a poetic version where there was this immigrant from Africa who was crossing a polar bear who was – the polar bear itself was a refugee. Climate refugee. They crossed paths. It wasn't a very long story, it wasn't realistic, it was what it was. It was beautiful. Probably one of the shows that has left me with some of the best memories of the work, ever in my life.

JD: How did you expect audiences to receive *Refugia*, and how did your expectations compare with how it was received?

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. The show was received in a beautiful way. Really powerful, beautiful way.

JD: It also stirred up some controversy –

DS: It did.

JD: – in review, 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? One of the characters, one of the actors was wearing – all together seven main characters with some interns actors with non-speaking parts. 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, what's called – I told you I don't remember what the name of it is, anyway, it's something that's a suit that made her look bigger. People complained. It wasn't time 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. There's no point in trying to make fun of anyone. The point is to just appear different, to be able to have – anyway, it was very received with great – there was a lot of aggressivity, I should say, towards us and our choices. 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, although I might say some of them, if you didn't know, could have been thought of as being potentially white, but they were not. It was very difficult, those criticisms were very difficult for the cast. We had a multiethnic cast, and it was hurt, profoundly hurt by the attacks that were made. You'd have to ask the people who really criticized us.

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. My sense of it was that you wanted to prick the viewer's conscience and make them uncomfortable. I wonder if you feel like your audience in the 21st century is losing some awareness of nuance or comfort with ambiguity, if the reception of *Refugia* illustrated that to you.

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. Also, in a very different way, a very tribal moment, divided their reign. That's how power works: by dividing people. We are divided. 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. I understand. But I'm not going to be the voice to support tribalism or the fact that we cannot live in other bodies than ourselves. I am not the one who would say let's try to cast somebody as a white actor who's in a part that shouldn't be white. That's not what we do. That's not what we've ever done. That's not the point. When Broadway does that, it's wrong. When a company like us, a company of artists, puts together the greatest cast possible, multiethnic cast, to tell 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*. I think this was the same year *Refugia* was released or performed when *Speechless* was written and also performed, and there are no spoken words in the performance, so the audience relies only – 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: The show *Speechless* didn't happen exactly right after. It took a while. 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. As seen by all the letters we got from refugees. By the way, I forgot to say that the head of the human refugee organization in Minnesota came and said this was the most beautiful piece ever. Ever. About refugees. All the other organizations that are pro-refugees, all of us came and told us, humanitarian groups, etc. Anyway. 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: You've taken on acting roles over the years, but really have been more of a producer –

DS: More of a director.

JD: A director. So if I'm not mistaken, in *Speechless*, you had an acting role. You joined the performance on stage for a portion. Why did you do that?

DS: Actually, it's my mistake, it's my fault if I gave you that impression. What happened when we did the creation was I was the director, I was not in it. The show did so well and was so well received that we thought we should give it a second run, and we're hoping actually to tour it, which didn't happen. People didn't come and see it at that time. Buyers, I mean. At the time, the actor was playing many roles in it, one of my co-artistic directors, actually, was hired to do a big role out of the city, and I said, "Well, maybe I could replace you." I hadn't acted in at least ten years. So I replaced him. I was basically doing a replacement. The excuse for me to be on stage had nothing to do with it, I was just replacing someone else.

JD: [laughs] Okay. 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: That is a lovely ending. I have one last question for you. Thank you so much for your patience and –

DS: It's a pleasure.

JD: I usually stop halfway through to ask for a break and we just plowed right through, but all of my guests this season for immigration stories have insisted on continuing, so that says something about resilience and the immigrant community, I suppose. 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: Thank you so much. That's a lovely note to end on. I'm gonna stop the recording now.