

Ep. 85: Theatre-makers Natasha Everitt and Deirdre Dwyer

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You're listening to The Nerve, an English and arts podcast from SETU.

I'm your host, Dr Jenny O'Connor.

It's always lovely to find out what our former students are up to, and so today it's a real treat to be joined by Natasha Everitt, an English and theatre studies alumnus.

Natasha graduated in 2017 and now works as a freelance professional actress and performer, voiceover artist, writer and drama instructor.

She has worked alongside Little Red Kettle, Jim Nolan, Amanda Coogan and the Experimental Film Society.

But the real reason she's here today is to chat about Time Passes, which will take place at Garter Lane on the 6th and 7th of March.

Time Passes tells the story of a woman at her tipping point who has stopped going to her recovery programmes and is dreaming of becoming a lawnmower.

You heard me right.

The production is directed by Deirdre Dwyer, a Waterford theatre maker, set and costume designer, writer and director, who is also no stranger to the podcast and who is here to join us, too.

So welcome to you both.

Natasha, I'm still reeling from that 2017 bombshell.

I know.

How can it be that long ago?

I don't know.

Time passes.

Isn't that a perfect segue?

So I know that our students are going to be interested to hear a little bit, actually, first, before you start to talk about Time Passes, if you don't mind, about your experience at SETU, because back then it was WIT.

It was a different iteration.

And you graduated before the pandemic turned everything upside down a little bit.

Give us a little sense of what your experience was like here for our students now.

Yeah, perfect.

So I originally started off as an English major and the course was amazing.

But I saw all the lovely theatre students frolicking around and having fun and the urge pulled me, pulled me towards.

So after my first year as an English major, I decided to come back again into first year because I loved it so much.

But this time as a theatre major.

And I hear now that the course is quite large, whereas I think there was like four or five of us in the theatre major class, which was it had its challenges.

But it was also really amazing because we were able to explore our personal interests a little bit more.

I know, for instance, in second year, we had Elizabeth Howard as one of our lecturers for a little while.

And sure, Elizabeth is amazing and she's mad as well.

And so she was really into performance art.

And that kind of that really connected with me and the types of work that I wanted to create.

So I think the smaller numbers were really interesting because it allowed me to find my voice in a really safe space.

And I was kind of encouraged to experiment and to play and to fail and to also really importantly fight my corner in what I felt was right.

So, yeah, it was it was an amazing experience.

And I just soak up these years, children, because it really is like the best time of your life.

I feel so old saying that, but like it just like it really is.

I was about to say old lady Natasha has spoken.

You know, students who complete their arts degree, arts degrees, and I was one of them, I suppose, are often a little bit anxious, aren't they, about what to do next?

But, you know, sometimes it's everybody wants a very clear cut path now.

Sometimes there's a bit of value, isn't there, in not really knowing.

What about you?

Did you have a strong sense that you wanted to be a performer when you left here?

I did, but also the realities of that are extremely difficult.

It's it's all well and good to like I want I want to go out and perform and I want to be on national stages, international stages.

I want to be able to follow that.

But it's like it's it's very difficult.

It is.

I think you have to have quite a high level of ambition and tenacity within yourself because you'd be wrecked doing it as well.

I remember actually, I think a year or so after I graduated, I came to talk to you because I wanted one of your critical theory handbooks because I was a big nerd and loved that class, and I just remember kind of going like, I don't actually know what I'm doing, but in that not knowing, it opens doors for you and it allows you to explore.

And I took a little break, once again, sounding like a little old lady.

I took a break from performing for a while.

I went and worked in the vintage factory for three years.

I went and did the whole I'm a waitress now and like did a few different other jobs, but essentially I got pulled back into performing because it's it's just inside of me, it's what I feel like I have to do.

And while the other jobs were amazing, I just wasn't being fulfilled in all of my possibilities.

And so I've been freelance now for three and a half years since we did Shakespeare Squared Twelfth Night, which was also the last time I was here talking to you.

Yeah.

And just having that opportunity to perform, like get paid to perform and to work with an amazing team.

It really just made me realise that this is this is what I'm supposed to be doing.

And there's days where it's going to be hard and there's days going to be where it's going to be amazing.

But it really is worth it's worth the grind if it's what makes you feel good inside your belly.

Yeah, you're so right.

And then the other thing actually that's really important around that, isn't it, is kind of professional development, because it sounds like you were really good at adapting and figuring out, well, if I want to do this, well, maybe I'm going to have to do a workshop on that or I'm going to have to read up on this.

I presume you had to kind of learn lots of new skills as well and to try and fit into all of the different roles that I kind of announced at the top of the podcast where you're kind of doing a little bit of teaching and a little bit of voiceover work.

So how did you find your way into all of those?

Waterford has been really good, actually, for having people come down and do courses.

So, for instance, the Theatre Royal hosted the Louis Lovett Playing for Your Audience course, which I went to do.

And it was amazing to be able to work with him.

Like some of his tenants were like, just do everything wrong and strong and don't apologise because you're actually just taking up too much time by apologising and just cracking on with things.

And so being able to do that was really amazing.

And then the Theatre Royal also hosted Rough Magic Page to Stage, which was really great and kind of having a base of a script and bringing it from page to stage and also getting to work with really recognisable theatre people was really important, especially as like a little baby theatre artist, because you see people at the peak of their trajectories of their careers.

And it's really like inspiring to be able to see that.

And as well, you kind of also have to be a bit admin-y being freelance.

It's not just I'm going to perform and I'm going to do Shakespeare.

And it's going to be wonderful.

You also have to be able to be like, I'm going to really hound these people and I'm going to let agents know that I'm here and let and let theatre companies know that I'm here.

So you're kind of working in many different spheres just as one as one human being.

So you kind of have to have your finger in all of the pies, so to speak.

Yeah, you have to diversify, I guess, and like know a little bit about keeping books and and all that kind of jazz.

OK, so let's get into the show.

Tell us about developing this story.

How did this come about?

Yeah, so it's...

Dee, was it in A Little Room last year or the year before?

I think it was the end of the year before.

So I think it was probably the end of 2024.

Is that right?

Yeah, it feels that feels right.

But I had so it started off in there.

The script originally started as a few different pieces of text that I had that I was never really too sure what to do with.

And then when I went into The Little Room, I was like, I'm going to merge some stuff and see what happens.

And it had a very good reception.

As you mentioned in the in the intro, there's the story about Jennifer, but she also dreams of being the lawnmower.

So we hear from the lawnmowers point of view quite a lot.

And a lot of the feed...

It's mad.

But a lot of the feedback that I got from A Little Room was we want more lawnmower.

We want that's that's what we want to to hear and to see.

And I was like, OK, cool.

So I kept writing over the year.

And Garter Lane were very good.

They gave me a professional development week where I was able to go in and use the space and work with Dee kind of in a more dramaturgical role where she was able to help me shape the script and kind of see what new path it would take.

And that was really important because it's like, while the heart of the script is the same, as much as I don't like saying it, it is a mental health play.

But it's.

It's grown and it's changed and it's I think it's found its own voice and the lawnmower, ironically, is a really good vehicle to express mental health without it being like negative mental health or, you know, bad mental health without it being too grim, grim, grim or like to like didactic.

Yeah, too on the nose and just yeah, you don't want it to be like, oh, so it's able to kind of be playful within within that as well.

So, Deirdre, this was the point where you got involved with it, is it?

Yeah, that's right.

I think we do think I think it was probably late twenty twenty four.

And Natasha and I are both on a little room on the committee for a little room.

So occasionally people who are using the facilities in the little room or residents there will ask for members of the committee to be involved in some way.

And I think it's under that capacity that Natasha invited me in in in this context.

And so I came into probably the kind of second to last reading of it.

And we were all the audience.

There was a lovely audience.

Those sharings are always on the first Tuesday of the month.

Yeah, that's right, isn't it?

And so they're free and open to audience members.

They're at six o'clock and just members of the public.

It's great to book so that everybody knows if you're coming.

And they're really diverse.

The little room is a really interesting place for the development of work.

And I think probably without your residency there would this have happened?

It might have happened in a different way.

I don't think so.

Yeah, definitely a good push to to have an audience react to your work.

You're kind of like, oh, it puts a bit of worth in it, because sometimes when you are writing, you can get very stuck in your own bubble and it's it's hard to see.

It's hard to know the quality sometimes without having a feedback.

Yeah, and that is the most beautiful thing about an audience in theatre is they will give you the feedback.

Yeah.

And you have to hunt for honest feedback.

And I think that the little room format allows for honest feedback in that context.

And we kind of loosely use a Liz Lerman method.

So it's always trying to keep the artist safe and protected because there it's a really vulnerable point when you're sharing something in development.

And so people were really interested in the lawnmower voice.

And I think and I hope this isn't in any way negative, it's because we hear a lot of mental health work.

And, you know, Natasha is resisting the idea that this is an issues play.

But it really is about a young woman who is having a mental health crisis.

And that is useful and interesting for us to portray on the stage, but it's not something that's not been portrayed on the stage before.

So I think it was the the disassociation or the possible disassociation of the protagonist where she connects with the lawnmower and the idea of a lawnmower, allowing her to articulate to us as an audience the things that were that are troubling her or that are exciting her.

And as Natasha says, the fact that that can be playful felt like a really important hook.

And then in the development process, I think what shifted from your sharing in a little room and this is all brilliantly, you know, from Natasha.

So kind of we work together kind of from a dramaturgical perspective.

And I'm putting that in inverted commas because I think that the most important bit of being a dramaturg, which I am not in any way, shape or form, really having talked to other dramaturgs, is to reflect back to the artist what they're trying to do.

And so we were working on that question about why wouldn't the piece be a written piece that you would read?

Is it a short story?

And so the first iteration, there was so much narration that it's that idea of in theatre it's to show, not tell.

So a lot of what you were doing was telling.

And that is a really valid art form.

And it could be really valid to write that.

But you were really interested that it become a theatre piece that would be live presented in front of an audience.

So we worked on questioning what bits do more showing and what bits do more telling.

So I think between that week, you kind of came up with three drafts over over a period of maybe 10 days where the drafts just kept refining.

And this was all due to Natasha kind of talking about what she was trying to do, hearing when some sentences weren't you weren't working with that big question about, like, show, not tell or what are we trying to communicate to an audience?

And you just kept refining it until we got to this place where I think they're instead of asking, why are you making this play now?

It was this play is a piece of art and should be put on.

So that's a really great kind of trajectory to come to over the space of a week where where, you know, we were going, well, you know, those questions about like, why now?

Why are you making this work now?

What are you putting it on?

And then they became less and less relevant as the artwork became more and more strong.

And you were like, because it's a great piece of art that needs to be presented.

So that was kind of where we landed.

And then we've started rehearsing after that.

And presumably you have to be really careful, but careful about the lawnmower side of things.

Right.

I'm really interested in this.

So the lawnmower.

Well, one thing, Natasha, when I read this, I was thinking, well, Natasha was always really interested in the critical theory.

This bit spoke to me.

Do you remember when we were doing The Vegetarian?

Yes, it's my favourite book.

Oh, I have it.

I have it still.

Yeah, this struck me as something that I was like, this sounds like she has gone there for that book.

And so for people who haven't read that book, a woman in that book undergoes the process of kind of becoming a tree, I suppose you could say, or shedding herself of her organs kind of thing.

When I kind of heard about your about your show and this idea of the woman kind of wanting to be a lawnmower, it's this kind of externalisation or but also this kind of embodiment of something other that seems to be a part of this.

Like, is it theory informed or am I just kind of am I grasping?

You're not grasping it.

But however, it it wasn't actively theory informed, but a lot of the media and books and things I'm taking in at the moment are it's all to do with women in transformational spaces and women kind of being more feral and exposed and real rather than the the polished stereotype of a woman.

Like, I'm very interested in I've been reading like Night Bitch, where a woman transforms into a into a wolf.

And, you know, she's kind of shedding her motherhood.

And then there's I haven't read this yet, but I have The Crustacean on the list, which is about a young woman who gets picked up by an older man who kind of locks her away.

And she starts to believe she's a crab.

And there's another great book called Hard Copy, where a woman falls in love with a printer.

I'm obviously very influenced by transformational woman.

And because sometimes there's just so much stuff put on us and it's it's hard to it's hard to express yourself as yourself.

Being able to have a an alter ego, even if that alter ego is a ride along lawnmower.

And why it's a lawnmower, I have no clue.

It just it came to me in the night.

But like it just yeah, it's I don't know why it's a lawnmower.

But yeah, well, I can totally see why it's a lawnmower.

It makes perfect sense.

It makes perfect sense.

Deirdre, what are the challenges of a one woman show where you have to incorporate this feature into it?

Yeah, we talked about how, you know, so the show we know is happening in March in Garter Lane.

So that's like something we know and can control.

So we know the space and we know the performer and we know the collaborators.

So there's Dermot and Ellen on board in the lights.

Dermot Quinn and Ellen Quilty on board for the lighting.

They're becoming a lighting team.

So that's kind of a really great opportunity for a young designer to get mentored by a more experienced designer.

Natasha's relationship with Alan McFadden, the sound designer.

So that is also an influential part.

So all of those kind of extra side bits became part of the whole.

And then in terms of working with a one woman show.

I guess I'm always thinking about the audience and what they will understand.

So like kind of boringly and reductively, particularly like Natasha is into work that doesn't explain itself, work that is more out there, that is pushing boundaries, making audiences question what they're seeing or what they're understanding.

I think is that fair to say?

That is absolutely fair to say.

I'm always concerned that an audience doesn't feel alienated by that work.

There is a huge proportion of Natasha's audience who will be interested in that work.

So I don't want to over explain either.

And like working with Natasha, there wouldn't be that wouldn't be allowed to over explain, but I do also want the audience to be in a position where they feel secure enough to experience it on their own terms.

So we're always thinking about what is clear, what is and what we're communicating with decisions.

And we're also really interested in using the performer.

She's our like palette.

So she's the it is Natasha as an actor and what Natasha as an actor can do and can communicate, that's what we're really interested in in exploring to.

Brilliant, and you're also interested in making accessible theatre, Deirdre.

So like in what way does that work inform this or how do those kind of interests come together?

Is it that idea of just making sure it's not too challenging or is that kind of your main focus here?

Yeah, I it's more certainly it's an economic accessibility is one of the main things that I'm interested in so that we talked about that, we talked about that with ticket pricing and that we didn't want to price this out from an audience, so there's accessibility in so many ways.

Certainly being in Garter Lane, it's one of the only accessible and not, of course, many of theatres are accessible, but it's one of the only ones where performers could also be wheelchair users, for example.

And so kind of working in an accessible venue.

And then also, I think not that it is comprehensive to everybody, because everybody in the world has their own unique way of understanding, but that there wouldn't be barriers in place, I suppose, to understanding that we probably have a ways to go in terms of accessibility.

We aren't using any audio descriptors or sign language.

We just don't have the budget in this iteration.

So perhaps going forward, we would look to do that.

But that's two more people to employ, I guess, in this context.

But also it's more about the economic barriers and the the work that Natasha has made previously has been from my from my knowledge of it, you know, accessible to other people.

So it's not just theatre goers with respect to the Jim Nolan audience who we love and Jim will hopefully come and see the show.

But it's not going to be necessarily the people who pay 25 euro for a Jim Nolan show that will come and see our work.

So, Natasha, tell me, I'm intrigued by this as well.

I know that there is some sexually explicit content.

Yes.

You don't always get that, do you?

When you go into Garter Lane, you see sexually explicit content and it's strictly over 18s.

So is it kind of is that an added challenge?

You know, when you kind of are telling your friends and family, come and support me and come and see the show.

Are you kind of nervous about how that will be received at all?

Honestly, no, because I think everyone, in no matter what way, shape or form, we are sexual beings.

Jennifer, who is the main character, she some of her struggles are compulsive sexual addiction.

So her her sexual life is probably a little different, definitely a little different to most other people's.

But like my mom's coming to see it.

And I was like, ma'am, I'm probably going to be in my knickers at one point.

And like, I'm going to be talking about strange things.

And she was like, scram, you're in your 30s.

So like, it's we're all adults here.

And that's why it's very important that the 18 plus is on it, because I do think like it is a little bit of a struggle because I do think that young young people will enjoy the show, but obviously you can't have anyone under the age of 18.

Come and see it.

So and I sometimes think those like not trigger warnings, but 18 plus sexually explicit, it can be a little this is I think there might be people disappointed with the level of sexual explicit in that context, because it's certainly not a rated or X rated.

I don't know what it is, but X rated.

But also the other things that are there, you know, Natasha has clearly articulated to me that, you know, the character isn't in inverted commas, again, likeable, you know, and we're not by presenting this work, endorsing the things that she does or that she experiences or that she has experienced.

And we're not presenting any of the actions and any of the harm that she does to herself through these actions as positive or sensible ways.

But because you are presenting work in a mental health like that, that is about somebody's mental health.

We have a mindfulness that just we want to be careful with how we are communicating with that.

And I guess to whom you are communicating and you don't want somebody who is really vulnerable or who has ideated self-harm or anything like that in a position where they feel vulnerable by the content that they're presenting.

But we also believe in the intelligence of our audience who can understand that this is an idea and an art piece that is exploring these ideas.

So we don't want to dumb it down either.

OK, so, well, is it going to be then a piece of theatre that is only for audiences who are able for and interested in experimental work, do you think?

Natasha, I come to you first.

Yeah, I think it's I think it is a show for everyone, because I think it's not for us to make up people's minds about what they like.

And I think it's very important to like the theatre should be a place where you come and you don't know what you're going to see.

You might you might come in and you might hate the play.

You might love the play.

You might be like, what am I watching?

But I think it's it's important for me, for audiences to feel something, even if that's something towards me is not great.

But at least I feel like at some point the job there is done because you're not leaving.

I kind of don't like a passive audience.

I want you to be annoyed at the actions or empathise or just feel something.

I think that's very important for me.

And also as well, it's while it is it's written by a woman, performed by a woman and also, very importantly, Women's Day is on the 8th of March.

And that is why I have chosen the 6th and 7th for the marketing of it and for the performing of it.

It's it does champion the female voice in its strange sexuality, its divine femininity and its absolute mortification.

But it is for everyone because we're all humans and we all...

Am I allowed to swear?

Swear away.

Thank you.

I'm not even going to say that bad of a word, but we all go through shit and we all feel fucking awful sometimes.

And like that's...

I hate being this person, but that's OK. But like that it's it's I think it's so important that we like talk about this and just really rip off the band-aid sometimes and allow ourselves to be like, I feel mental sometimes and I don't know how else to explain or to describe it.

And I feel like I might have gone off topic from your from your question.

So I'm going to stop talking now.

No, you didn't actually.

But Deirdre, what do you think?

I mean, you clearly saw something in this that you think is going to appeal to to people.

Yeah, I mean, there's kind of two sides.

Number one is like support the artists to make the work they want to make.

And that being a theatre maker, you have to make work for an audience.

So you cannot be a theatre maker in a room on your own.

That is just not how it works.

So you have to think about whether there will be people to receive that.

And I think the what is really interesting about Natasha's piece is it doesn't make it OK. So you were kind of saying it is OK to have bad mental health days.

For sure it is.

But it might not resolve by the end of a 45 minute to an hour play.

And you won't be you won't get a resolution of and then she took her meds and everything got better, you know, that's life doesn't work like that.

It's not it's not wrapped up.

No, not at all.

So this person is experiencing a long arc of mental health and mental health difficulties.

We all have mental health, good and bad, but mental health difficulties like extreme ones.

But we can't fix that for her in in this.

So it's kind of those are the the sticky areas that we have found ourselves in.

You know, when you want like there's a gut instinct that you want everything to be happy by the end.

And so kind of if there's a trigger warning in it, it's that this isn't tied up in a bow and by the end of the piece, but it will stay with you.

And I think you talking about audiences feeling something that feels really important, that they're not passively receiving this and they are going to they may be upset, they may be angered, they may be delighted, they may laugh, you know, they may find all of those emotions coming out of them.

But I think in the same way that you were saying everybody feels things like is this just a play for young women?

No.

Is this a play for humans?

Yes, fully.

So, Natasha, you're going to be a bit of a provocateur, is what I'm hearing.

Yeah, maybe.

Good.

That is a good ambition, I feel like.

Today, in this day and age, that's what we want to be.

That's what we should all be.

OK, great.

And so you, I presume you want people to run to the Garter Lane website and hoover up those tickets.

That's where they can get tickets, right?

Yes, you can get them on the Garter Lane website.

You can also call up their box office if you're old school or if you fancy going in because everyone in Garter Lane is sound, pop in and buy a ticket there and also see all the other wonderful things that are on.

And if you follow me on Instagram, there's also a link in my bio, which you can follow to get the tickets as well.

Great, great.

Would you like, I mean, if this is a roaring success, would you put it on again?

Do you think, what are the, you know, do you have some ambitions for this beyond?

Yes.

So I recently, it's very exciting, I recently, in January, I, what's the word?

I sent in my Dublin Fringe Festival application.

So we won't hear about the answer from that until mid-April.

But I want it so hard.

Like, I just, I want it with every fibre of my being, because for me, the Dublin Fringe is like, that's where the show belongs.

And after that, I'd also like to, or I'd like to tour it around.

This is not, I don't want to make a piece of work and for it to have a moment and disappear again, because so much work has gone into this and I haven't been able, like, everyone's come on this knowing that there's, you know, I'm not rolling around in money, none of us are.

But it's not a funded piece.

It's been funded delightfully by Waterford City Council.

Yes.

And through their arts grant.

Yes.

But it's not an Arts Council funded play.

So people, everyone that's come on board, this has come on board with their goodwill and their amazing talent and their professionalism.

And I want to see this, like, I'd bring this around the country with no money and just if everyone was willing to and just bring it to the theatres and make it happen, because it's so important to me that this work gets seen.

And without sounding like egotistical, I think it's very important for me at this point in my career as well to showcase myself and to platform myself, because I want other people to see my work and to see that I'm here and to know what it is that I do.

So that can then in turn lead to more work, not for me only, but for the directors and set designers and lighting designers and music composers.

So it's it's it's to be able to platform everybody as this beautiful, creative team.

That's fantastic.

I love your energy and I love your attitude.

I think this is going to be great.

I can foresee it.

We now have and we're going to have an episode on this, which is upcoming.

But we have a team of students who have set up our first literary magazine.

Glore.

Glore.

And so we might just send somebody along to review that.

It's so great.

And we'll put you in the annals.

Listen, thank you so much to both of you for joining me today.

I appreciate it so much.

You're so good.

And you can get tickets for time passes in Garter Lane at garterlane.ie It's on the 6th and the 7th of March.

Best of luck with it.

Thank you so much.

Thank you.