**UNFIXED Dialogues: Jo Baker (JB) and Michele Saint-Yves (MSY)**

JB: It’s Joanne Baker here for PBA FM, and I’m talking to Michele Saint-Yves …

MSY: Close enough.

JB: Thank you very much, about the Unfixed Dialogues, and the work she’s been doing in plays. Right, so tell us about yourself.

MSY: Hey, Jo, thanks for inviting me to Salisbury, it’s been a good 10 years since I’ve been up this way.

JB: It’s changed a lot, hasn’t it?

MSY: Yeah, it has. It seems to be more diverse than I remember, ethnically more diverse, so that’s lovely.

JB: That’s a good thing, it’s pretty amazing. So, tell us about your work.

MSY: I have always had a passion for the arts. I was a political lobbyist for 15 to 20 years, and a good 10 years of that I would have used art, in particular theatre, community theatre, youth theatre, as a way to work with disenfranchised communities to get their voice around conflict and issues and systemic problems that were perhaps at the root of some of the symptoms that were happening for that community, and theatre and community art were always a tool of mine to be able to engage those at-risk communities or disenfranchised communities or communities in conflict with each other, to actually express their views on matters of interest to council, to state government, to federal government, and so even though I was a political lobbyist, art has always been a part of it, always been a passion for me. I actually started out, I was a visual artist in my late teens, early 20s, had a few exhibitions, and then got into politics, so that diverted me for a while, but I didn’t write, so I was a producer as opposed to a creator, in terms of theatre, and I didn’t write, so the writing is a direct result of what happened to me, in terms of I have an acquired brain injury, and the first symptoms occurred 14 years ago. I was 33, and over a number of years I just significantly deteriorated until I became bedbound for about nine months, and all I could do, I couldn’t watch TV, I couldn’t play DVDs, I couldn’t look at my computer, and the only thing I could do was have a pen and paper on my lap, and that is how I started writing, and I had never written prior, so, my writing life is a direct result of …

JB: Of your brain injury.

MSY: Yeah, I literally, it saved me, in terms of my mental health, and my emotional wellbeing, my psychological wellbeing, and a matter of enquiry about my own condition, so it was a way for me to learn about my own body wisdom, because I didn’t know it very well, I did not know my body very well, clearly, because I would have picked up earlier, but the writing was a way for me to enquire and interrogate my own body, and to understand and become wiser about what my body …

JB: And what you were feeling and going through.

MSY: What I was feeling, so writing literally saved me through years of deterioration, and I wrote myself off a page onto a new blank page, and literally created a new story for myself, and a new career, and a new way of being in the world, really, and I’ve never stopped writing since, and I can’t not write now, it’s like an absolute necessity for my existence that I write, and it’s a strange thing for me because I had never conceived of myself as writing. But theatre was interesting, because I think I’ve always been very passionate, as I said, about theatre, and I think what it was, was that I wrote a whole series of vignettes and short stories, and I realised that the form they needed to take, it was actually one character throughout, and the form that it needed to take was theatre, it wasn't a novel, it wasn't a short, I saw it all onstage, really clear, but I also knew that I didn’t know the craft, so I went and enrolled when I kind of had one of my first interventions, I eventually had a craniotomy, and I improved for a bit, but over that period I went, I enrolled in a writing-for-performance qualification, and got mentored by some fabulous professional women theatre makers here in Adelaide, and did a two-year residency at State Theatre under a director, and learnt the craft, and after four years …

JB: Thoroughly learnt the craft.

MSY; Yeah, and after four years came out with my first full draft, two full-draft plays and within a year of graduating had my first full production, full stage production, and about three one-act plays done, and just went on from there.

JB: That would have been awesome to see.

MSY: Yeah, it was great.

JB: What was your first play about?

MSY: Facing mortality, I think that was what it was about. It was about realising, how, when you’re faced with mortality, how all the superficiality of your relationships, or all the things that you’ve compromised or known have been issues, but really you’ve lived with, suddenly become, I’m not willing to live with anymore. So, it was about a breakup of a relationship, as well, and then as a result of that mortality, dying, facing death, and about a breakup of a relationship, when all of that, just, all the things you’re willing to compromise on in a long-term relationship no longer willing to compromise, so that’s what the first one was about. But both of my full-length plays have live music, original music was written for each of the pieces, so I’ve actually worked with musicians, singer-songwriters, and we had the live musician onstage as another party to the play, and their lyrics were actually part of moving the characters forward, so the lyric wasn’t just interlude, background music, the lyrics were actually part of the text, and they picked up the emotion or gave a relief, or gave an undertow emotion that moved an audience that couldn’t be said, so there was a feel about the music that emotionally took the audience, so interestingly, both my full-length-production pieces have had live musician integral to the drama.

JB: Well, it would add a whole new depth to it, as well; I love the idea.

MSY: So, my one-act plays haven’t, they’ve all just been straight characters, but …

JB: But the branching out into music …

MSY; But the two full-length ones, yes, have, because there’s something about the emotional around the music and the lyric that drops a level emotionally for, I think, for audiences, that an actor or just being said can’t take.

JB: Oh, absolutely, it appeals to a different part of your brain as well.

MSY: Yeah, so it’s that sensory expansion which is a bit of what Unfixed was about, is that sensory expansion, and all the levels that we drop through that informs how we deal with whatever our incapacitation or alternative capacity, altering capabilities are, but also what you drop through in terms of how you make your art and what you want your art to say, to find that form is really important.

JB: I can see that. In your bio, you mention that you’re a poet.

MSY: Yes, probably not a successful one, but yes.

JB: Nobody’s a successful poet, don’t worry about that one. Look, was your poetry part of your rehabilitation?

MSY: Yes, I only had a certain view, so I just did poems of what I saw out my window every day, so my poetry was a form of tuning my observational skills and how to write with clarity and discipline, and that’s what I love poetry for, is it’s incredibly hard to write good poetry, and all I could, I literally use it ask trying to come out and see the same things that you see all the time, but try and describe them in fresh ways every single day, now that’s a huge challenge, and successful, good poetry is something that everyone knows and sees all the time, but there’s just a putting together of a few simple words and you’ve got a whole fresh …

JB: To make it clearer, yeah.

MSY: And it just is revelatory, and you just go …

JB: How did they know that?

MSY: There’s moments of that, and so poetry for me was, yes, part of my healing, but because I spent so much time in bed lying down, that my views were very restricted, so it’s a way for me to hone my observational skills, create discipline in use of words, and punctuation and a rhythm, and structure, but particularly to really try and get fresh associations of everyday things together.

JB: I would love to hear some of your poetry, I don’t suppose you brought, and you don’t have any memorised?

MSY: No, no.

JB: Oh, what a shame. Well, a lot of people write poetry just for themselves as well.

MSY: Yeah, oh, you have to. I write for myself, I don’t write for anyone else.

JB: I used to write just for myself, but then I got involved in writing groups and then I started trying to make them happy, and that’s actually good fun, to make people, well, manipulate people that way.

MSY: Yeah, look, I don’t write for other people, I don’t write what I think is marketable, and that’s probably why I’m not very successful at getting grants, but I don’t, I very much write for myself. For example, when I write I don’t read other people’s work, I’m very separate when I have a reading time, and when I have writing time, and I don’t read when I’m in a writing phase. I have visual art around me, so I have pictures and images around me, and music, but I do not have words, I do not have other people’s writing around me, and I have no idea if people will like my work or not, I don’t have a particular audience in mind. I seriously am writing for me; I’m not writing for anyone else. If other people like it, lovely.

JB: And if they don’t, too bad.

MSY: It’s not why I’m writing, I’m not writing to make money, to make a career, to please.

JB: You’re writing for you.

MSY: I’m writing for me.

JB: You’re a purist.

MSY: I am, I am a purist, yeah, I often say that, and people laugh, but it’s true. I verge on puritanical at times, definitely a purist.

JB: Do you want to tell us about the Unfixed Dialogues scheme, or program, I should say?

MSY: Yeah, the reason I applied for it, which is probably my starting point, is that, as I’ve just told you, my writing life is a direct consequence of my ABI, and it’s invisible, no one, I look incredibly healthy, I just want to say that on radio.

JB: No, you do, you look incredibly healthy.

MSY: I look incredibly healthy. When I’m out in the world I look completely, the majority functional in terms of I have no walking stick, I have no outward sign that there’s stuff going on that’s disabling for me, so I deal with this dissonance between what people see and how I experience constantly, and it’s a challenge, it’s very interesting, and I am asked, if I’m asked I will talk about it, but I don’t generally volunteer or talk about it, because I don’t want to be defined, it’s defining, it’s absolutely defining, but I’m not defined by it, and I think that’s a really important distinction, so my day-to-day life and how I’m in the world, I define it by my capacities, given my particular symptoms or whatever that day. So, the kind of art networks that I’ve been involved with and the discussions that I’ve had with people who create, and particularly because now the form in which I’ve become a creator is in writing, so I was really, I’ve been very fascinated about the creative process, I’m fascinated by it, because it is such a solitary …

JB: And it’s almost like magic really.

MSY: Yeah, you don’t quite know what goes on and happens, and there’s a great deal of solitude and it’s a solitary exercise, and I’m very inquisitive about people’s process, but the only people I’ve had that discussion with are people who do not define as having a disability, so the writers who I have talked to are not artists with a disability, and I’ve always felt like I’ve only got so far, and their experience doesn’t quite resonate with me, like I always felt, yeah, yeah, I got that, but surely there’s more, because for me there’s way more, it’s such a physically intimate process for me, and there’s something happening there that I don’t get from, I haven’t yet really got kind of a mirror back from someone else about the kind of process I go through, and it’s like bottomed out, I’ve hit a point and it’s …

JB: You just can’t relate.

MSY; Yeah, then it goes, okay, yeah, got there, but there’s more, and I think that was my impetus for the Unfixed, I was very keen to talk with other, because I am not part of the artists who identify with disability, I’ve not been part of, I don't know any artists with a disability, well, I do now, but I didn’t, I mean I knew of Gale Mallis’s [?] work, went to see her show, obviously, being an ex-theatre designer and director, but I haven’t had those conversations, I’ve not identified, I’ve not come out like that, this is the first time I think I’ve actually come out and identified as an artist with a disability, it’s the first time I’ve done it, so it was a really big process for me, and I really went in because I really wanted to see if there was a difference, I really wanted to interrogate, really, and enquire, you know, in a beautiful way …

JB: Oh, absolutely, a sharing and giving interrogation.

MSY: [0:19:00.4] kind way, what the intricacies of their processes and the relationship, their sensory relationship of their physicality with their creative process, and if that was different, so that was really why I wanted to do it.

JB: And what did you find out?

MSY: It’s substantially different, and I got the resonance that I felt I knew was there. There were four artists in particular that I did this enquiry with, who were in completely different situations than me, and yet I went, oh, my god, yes, that’s how I feel, yes, that’s what I do, oh, my god, you go through the same steps, you do the same process, and it was just revelatory, it was just like …

JB: You weren't so alone anymore.

MSY; And then processes others went through who did that level of enquiry with me, who were willing to go to that level of interrogation, it was just so specific and so unique to them, yet for me it was transformative, I kind of just went there is something very unique, and somehow it unpacked the level of sensory and physicality around the process that talking with artists without disability couldn’t articulate or didn’t feel in the same way, or never described their process in the way that these artists did on Unfixed. I asked the same questions, yet get completely nuanced, completely layered, and very unpacked in terms of real clarity around their relationship of how they exist in their bodies, the physical act of making their art, and all of that relationship, their relationship of how they are in relation to their audience when they make their art, their point of view, their use of materials, and the relationship with the materials, and why they did certain, and as a result of their particular physical condition, how that would come up with quite an innovative and really creative mark, or way of making work, but wouldn’t have been of, like, it was just such an eye-opener for me and I found what I was in search of.

JB: And what are you planning to do with that information now?

MSY: Well, nothing. There’s nothing I can do about it, because …

JB: But, it’s part of your psyche now.

MSY: Absolutely, and the way …

JB: Will it influence your writing?

MSY: Yeah, it can’t not. It’s influenced more than my writing, it’s actually, what I came out with it was that in the 10 artists, we were all so different form each other, in terms of the disability, in terms of the levels of support requirement, the history, the kind of art we make, the diversity was extraordinary, and being with that group and just listening and being with them, and hearing how they exist, and then over two weeks intensely discussing so that then you dropped to understand the psychology, just your understanding of their existence just drops and drops, but through the absolute unique specificity of their situation, it kind of hit like an underground well, where it just then expanded into this common ocean, and it felt like my sense of humanness just expanded enormously, and it was through these channels of unique specificity of their existence somehow dropped into this underground ocean of humanness that just dropped in every cell, like a depth charge in every cell of my body, and I just came out with my feeling of sensory humanness was just expanded enormously, and it’s in every cell of my body, I can’t not come out, and it’s affected everything since, so it can’t not affect my writing, because it literally has affected my sense of being human. Wow, how can you ever make a product of that? You can’t buy, value, anything that, it was extraordinary.

JB: Do you think it’s because they’re more in touch with their body that they can communicate so well to you?

MSY: No, I think it’s because they’re artists.

JB: Ah, so it’s about the artists, but you’ve been involved with artists before and not felt that connection. What do you think made the difference?

MSY: Well, no, it is because of the way they make their art. Their creative awareness and enquiry, I think, is much more consciously interrogated and enquired and decided than probably the artists that I’ve talked to, because there are so many matters that you need to address, to make your art, so your level of consciousness about your process is much more heightened, but they’re still being creative, they’re still artists, so I think they’re coming with a creative enquiry, but it’s so much more conscious and heightened because of the decisions that need to always be acknowledged, and made and in every moment in order to create it.

JB: I can see that, I can see how it would be far more demanding to be an artist with a disability and to actually produce the work, you have to literally do 10 times the amount of work.

MSY: Yep, I can’t speak for others, but …

JB: To a degree.

MSY: But that would be interesting to hear on the other interviews, or read, if there’s a common sense of that or not, but it was interesting because the UK people were very, I got the impression they were interested that we put ourselves as artists, that’s how we defined how we are there with a disability, whereas I got the sense that they kind of like disabled artists, was the other, and I think they found, so there was an interesting initial discussion around the difference.

JB: I can understand that. As I said before, I have issues with the word disabled, I think alternatively-abled is a far better term, but people wouldn’t understand it, but personally, as someone who is disabled, I know that I am far more able in other sectors than most able people are, and so I’m alternatively-abled.

MSY: Like when I don’t, my creativity has exploded, like the more physically still I’ve become, my creativity has just gone mad, like, that’s not a good word to use, has gone, it’s gone ballistic, it’s gone through the roof, I have so much ideas, so much I want to write, the more still and more physically my capabilities are challenging me, creatively they’re exploding, so it’s fascinating to me, that’s one of my outcomes of this concept of augmentation, I feel like creatively I’ve been augmented while my physical function has reduced and been constrained.

JB: You’ve adjusted.

MSY; Yeah, I view it like a mosaic, I don’t view it as a spectrum, I don’t view it as a continuum, I don’t view it as either/or, I view all our functioning as human beings and how you can be in the world around that as a mosaic, and some things are going to be lit up and have lots of detail, and other areas could be beautifully, simply white, simply colourless, or a simple, beautiful monotone, or some could do all the bells and whistles and ones could just be a silent, beautiful …

JB: Moment in silence.

MSY: And I just think some are going to be switched on and some aren’t, but if the ones that are switched on, the ones aren’t necessarily not, they might actually be gathering and starting to regenerate and might be actually developing underneath something that you don’t know, while that’s going on, and so I kind of see all of our things as a mosaic, and on any given day I will have some things in hibernation and other things going off. Another day it will be a complete different pattern with different colours, different patterns in that mosaic, every single moment will be a different mosaic pattern of my ability, and I’ve no idea what it will be, so that’s my view of all, I don’t, a mosaic is probably the way I’d …

JB: I know personally, when you said that your writing saved you, I understand that really well, I feel the same way for me, I was bedridden, and until I started writing again that was almost the impetus to move, and to change the view, and yeah, I feel like it saved me. Did you feel like there were a lot of people with disabilities who can benefit from learning to express themselves like this?

MSY: I think any form of expression, to equip yourself with any kind of tool to make your mark, outside of yourself, is a healthy thing, and you don’t need an audience, just make, express, through any, I use the word mark in an allegorical, artistic sense, but any attempt and act of marking outside yourself …

JB: Of looking outside yourself even.

MSY: It is healthy, and doesn’t matter what form, as long as you know it’s for you, so don’t let that inner critic ever stop you, there’s no excuse.

JB: We’re always our harshest critics, let’s face it, that’s a good, healthy thing, but at the same time, that voice can get too loud and too domineering, and when you’re recovering from an injury or an illness, it’s almost overwhelming for a lot of people.

MSY: And it simply can be scratches of pencil on paper, it could be one word that you repeat and repeat over and over again, for pages and pages, it doesn’t matter what it is, it could be finger painting, crochet, it doesn’t matter what material or form it is, making that marking of expression outside of yourself is a healing thing to do.

JB: Yep, I agree totally.

MSY: And, as with everything, just practise, just do the next one and the next one and the next one, take the next step, the next step, and just keep practising, practise, practise.

JB; Yep, I understand that. One of my favourite sayings is, I think, is a Buddhist saying, which is the difference between a master and an apprentice, is the master has failed more times than the apprentice has ever tried, and just keep slogging at it, you can’t help but get better.

MSY: No, I came out of this Unfixed residency with that transformative experience, but I also came out and got, in the next month, got two reject letters, so you’ve got to go, yeah, it’s a life, that’s the creative life, you have to, particularly in theatre and writing, it’s …

JB: It’s a very competitive area.

MSY: It’s very hard, you’ve just got to, but for all writers, no matter what form, rejection is huge.

JB: It’s very, very common, and it’s something you’re supposed to get used to, and I never ever do, I find it very difficult to submit writing, I make a joke, I will not submit.

MSY: Well, absolutely, yeah.

JB: It’s about judgement as well, and it’s very hard to pull yourself away from that and realise that it’s not actually a personal thing.

MSY: Well, I think, actually, that’s a very good point, editing, that’s 90% of writing, 10% is the actual creative idea, fun thing, 90% of it is just hard slog editing. I can write my first draft within a few months, then it will be years of redrafting, 30, 40 drafts, it’s just edit after edit, after edit, and it’s never finished, and you have to deal with other people’s points of view and opinions, and because you do need to have readers.

JB: I was going to ask that, actually, do you have a select few that you run your works by?

MSY: Yes, I do, but I usually workshop with actors, I go straight to actors, usually. The best way to know a script is hand it over to actors and get another directorial colleague in and just get them to pull it apart, really. That’s what I do with my draft plays, rather than go to readers, I hand it over, I maybe have one or two readers go through the script, to get it to a point, but the best thing for me is hand it to actors, and get them to play with it.

JB: Well, then you can literally see how it’s turning out.

MSY: Yes, and I’ve completely reconstructed the plays as a result of two weeks working with actors, so two weeks is usually a good time to get a really good …

JB: That’s a lot of work.

MSY; And I usually discover, they discover things about the play I didn’t even realise, because they’re embodying, and when you write for theatre, you have to imagine the words in the physicality, and it changes the meaning of the words, when that actor physically embodies your words, it changes the meaning and the way I work is I work with directors and actors and I actually am changing the script throughout the whole process, so it’s not a fixed script they get, I collaborate.

JB: Oh, I bet the actors would love that.

MSY: So, I will change according to the final actor who’s in the performance, I often will change words to suit the way the actor expresses themselves, and their look and their presence, because you can feel it in their breath, you can feel it in the way they hold the word in their chest or in the way that they move through a sentence, and the way that they pause, and the way that they breathe, the rhythm of their own physical mechanics as they say the phrases and do the dialogue, and it changes, so it’s quite a very different process than, say, obviously, who I’d get to read my poetry or I’m halfway through a novel at the moment, 60% of the way through a novel, so, the process that I’ll go through for the novel is going to be very different than what I go through for plays, it’s quite different.

JB: Well, it’s a totally different format to begin with, but, yeah, I can see that. As a poet, what kind of poetry do you write? I generally write rhyme, but I write odd rhyme, and I’m trying not to rhyme at the moment, which is really quite hard, because I’ve been rhyming since I was a teenager. So, what sort of poetry do you write?

MSY: I like, I look for an internal rhythm, rather than a rhyme. Sometimes on the page, the words don’t look like they rhyme, but they’re close enough when you speak them.

JB: Slant rhyme, yep.

MSY: But I’m really looking for freshness of associations and of description of ordinary things, and that it has its own internal rhythm, and a particular voice. I try to find the particular voice of the poem, so I’m not, I don’t have particular forms, I’ve twice done particular forms like a villanelle, a sonnet …

JB: Everyone has to do a sonnet.

MSY: And I like the discipline of that, but I use them as keeping my craft tuned up, but it’s not the actual poems that I generally write. I can’t tell you what kind of poetry I write. As I said, they’re mostly based on observational …

JB: That’s a skill in itself.

MSY: But they’re very emotional. I’m often surprised by how emotional they are, I’m quite struck, when I think I’m doing quite an observational, I’m starting with things that I see, or something that I’ve done, a walk that I had, and I read it and go, wow, that was very emotional, not the same emotion, everyone, but I’m always struck at the emotion that is underneath it.

JB: The extra level.

MSY: So, clearly it’s my emotional writing outlet, even though on the surface that’s not …

JB: Not what you originally planned.

MSY: No, it’s not the departure point when I go into writing a poem, I don’t go in with an emotion I’m seeking to express, I go in with …

JB: And you find it.

MSY: Yes, it reveals itself when the poem’s finished, yeah, and then if you see that, if you pick up that emotional undertow, that then informs the editing, then that happens. That’s what happens for me, so, I don't know, I know the subject I’m writing about, then I’ll finish the poem, leave it aside for a while, get back to it and go, wow, what emotion, there’s an emotion underneath, there’s a distinct emotion that is under, revealed itself in that poem. Okay, what’s that? Okay, that’s a clear subtext, so, that then informs my next edit, and I will often change a word or restructure a line, in order to distil that emotion, without making it bleeding obvious, without smacking you on the head, it’s finding that balance between making it a purity of the observation in the sense of the doing, the subject, but underneath having this clarity of emotional undertow to it, and that’s a real distillation process, and finding the balance between the two is really, it’s what I struggle, and is a challenge for me.

JB: It’s what you strive for. Now, tell us about your novel.

MSY: I can’t, I have no idea what it’s about.

JB: But, you’re two-thirds of the way through?

MSY: I am, yet I don’t know what it’s about, and I never thought I would write a novel, but I find myself writing this character’s voice, and it wasn’t a character in a play, it wasn't a play, and I also felt very adventurous about this character, and so for me, I just started writing having no idea what I was writing, where it was going, having clueless, and I don’t write without a clue, this is the first time …

JB: You’re being led by your characters.

MSY: Totally, well, I am in my plays, but my plays are very planned out, they’re very well researched, they take me five-to-seven years to write, they’re a lot of hard work, and I have five plays on the go at any given time, at various different stages, but they’re really planned, they’re really researched, they’re really developed. Even my poems are very structured, there’s a process I go through, they’re quite planned, I have a project plan that I put over them, that I sieve them through, so, again, very structured, very analytical. Then I found myself with this character, going, I’ve no idea what they’re about to do, what they’re about to say, I’ve no idea what their world is, I’m just going to see what the next few words unfold, and I went, this is a novel, and I just need to, I still don’t know, all I know is the next sentence or the next few words coming out, and I’m loving it, it’s the most courageous writing I’ve ever done.

JB: It’s adventurous writing, very much so.

MSY: Absolutely, and for me it feels like such an act of courage, because I have no idea what I’m doing.

JB: You’re stepping off blindly.

MSY: Yeah, and I just have faith that I just need to listen for those next few words and make sure, can I hear them, are they the right ones? And follow, and usually that then leads to, yeah, and I’ve started a podcast series on it, on writing my novel, so I’ve done three episodes, because I got back to it on the 1st December, and I write it over summer, so I write it over my semester breaks, and I write over summer, and I got back to it on the 1st of December, and I decided to create a kind of a podcast about the end of my day, it’s called Balcony Blues, and I do the podcast about my day of writing, about where I’m at, what I did that day, and it’s about midnight on my balcony, and I do a recording, and it’s up on Sound Cloud and it’s called Balcony Blues.

JB: So, if anyone wants to hear it they can follow that up.

MSY: And it’s a bit of an insight into decisions I’m making about the novel and the process that I’m going through, and it’s been really helpful for me, actually, I don’t do that, again, being really brave, I’ve never done that before with any of my other writing, so it’s kind of matching, kind of this reflective podcast series is as brave as me writing the novel.

JB: I think it is actually, because it’s making you have a deadline as well, that you wouldn’t necessarily have.

MSY: No, no deadline, no, no, there’s no deadline, it happens as it happens. The only thing I do have, is I have a word target, that’s all I have, so I’m a Capricorn, I need some structure, and a plan, so I have a plan, so my deadline is effectively word number, so I have a word number that I’m working to, and that’s the only target I have, and there’s no date on that, the deadline is the number of words, that’s my …

JB: Until it’s finished.

MSY: Until it’s finished, and it’s finished when I hit that target, and I need that, I need to have a …

JB: A shutdown point.

MSY: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JB: What do you think is a reasonable target for a writer?

MSY: Target?

JB: Word count per day.

MSY: Well, you have to go with the story, you can’t, you have to go by the work; the work will tell you.

JB: Okay, so even though you, so you don’t have a specific word count that you go to every day?

MSY: No.

JB: It’s just wherever it takes you?

MSY: Yeah, yeah, I can spend, I have to just show up at the page every day. I could spend hours pottering, or being in front of the page and only write two lines, but I know my subconscious is working, just the fact that this is the space I’ve created for my, to write today, but there are days where I might just write two lines, but I know that just by having showed up at the page and being in that writing space, something subconsciously is going on, and true enough, then I’ll usually have a period where I write thousands of words …

JB: You get trapped into the zone.

MSY: A thousand words a day, so, I’ve come to trust and rely just have the discipline of creating that writing space each day, and I don’t have to produce words, bonus if I do, and sometimes I produce words and they’re absolute crap.

JB: I’ve done that, sure.

MSY: But that doesn’t matter, it doesn’t matter, because you’ve just got to get your first draft out, you’ve just got to get it all out, just get it all out, it’s your first draft, just get it out.

JB: That sounds like the best advice you can give another writer, is just to get that writing out.

MSY: And show up at the page each day, it’s discipline, it takes an awful amount of discipline because it’s such a solitary …

JB: Existence.

MSY: Creative work to do, and I spent a good three-odd years on my own writing my plays and then only have very short intense periods where I work with other people, and so you might have six months working with a project team, but that’s six months out of four-to-five years for me of working on that, and the rest of it was on my own, so …

JB: A very solitary existence.

MSY: Yeah, which is partly as a result of not functionally being available. I do spend so much time on my own anyway, as a result of my brain injury, so, physically not having the capacity to be out in the world, so it suits, I suppose.

JB: I can see that. Now, if anyone wants to find out any more information about you, how do they do that?

MSY: Haven’t a clue.

JB: No Facebook pages or websites?

MSY: Don’t have website, no, don’t have an author profile, no, I keep it pretty low key. You can hear my podcasts on Sound Cloud, and if they want to get in touch with me they can get in touch with me at ANAT or Access to Arts, I suppose.

JB: Well, thank you so much for your interview today, it’s been a real pleasure, and yeah, I’ve really enjoyed it.

MSY: Me too, thank you.

JB: No worries.

[ENDS]