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START AUDIO

Presenter: Hello and welcome to Horizon Radio. Horizon is a performing arts showcase at the Edinburgh Festivals. Horizon Radio is a series of conversations between the 2023 showcase artists, exploring their work, influences and wider practice.

What you are about to hear is a conversation between artists Ray Young and Raquel Meseguer Zafe. We hope you enjoy listening.

Ray: Hiya.

Raquel: Hi, Ray.

Ray: Hi, Raquel.

Raquel: Hi. So, I’m Raquel and I’m bringing a show called ‘A Crash Course in Cloudspotting’ to Edinburgh as part of Horizon.

Ray: I am Ray and I am bringing a show called ‘BODIES’ as part of the Horizon showcase to Edinburgh this August. I really love the title of your show.

Raquel: Do you?

Ray: Yeah.

Raquel: What does it make you think of?

Ray: I don't know, but it’s really intriguing.

Raquel: Yeah. The piece that I’m bringing is all about rest and resting in public. It’s something that I’ve had to do for… like, actually, I’ve been doing as a, kind of, practice for about seven, eight years now. I guess the title was a, kind of, play on the idea that we’ve forgotten so much how to rest and how to slow down, and how to tune back into those deeper rhythms of nature that we might get to a point where there’s, like… you know they’ve got those books that are like ‘Website Design for Dummies’ or, like… that we might need something like that to remind us how to rest because we’ve moved so far away from that rhythm in our really sped-up, hyper-productive, hyperactive, yeah, systems and lives.

How about ‘BODIES’? How did that title come about?

Ray: I really connect with what you were saying there about forgetting how to rest, because I guess, like… well, ‘BODIES’ is… how did I come up with a title for ‘BODIES’? I’ll segue into why I feel like it’s interesting. I guess because I was thinking about bodies of water, like, bodies of water exist throughout the world and then I was thinking about how we are these bodies of water also. I just kept thinking about, like, how continents have shifted, and moved and how we… as we migrate and shift and we move and what it might mean when we start coming back together again.

Anyway, so, that was, kind of, like, the basic premise for the work, but, also, it’s interesting, because I think that when I was thinking about making this work, it is very much about… which is very much a call to action in terms of regards to climate and as it particularly pertains to water, I was also thinking about how water has… how a restful state can be found in water, how we retreat to water to, kind of, like, rest and rejuvenate. It offers that, as well as, sort of, this power to engulf and destroy, but, yeah, it felt really important to me that, like, ‘BODIES’, as a piece of work, has a moment where… or at least begins in a moment where we are considering what it means to be held, and rest and be restful in a restful state. Yeah.

Raquel: That’s so interesting, that it feels like both our pieces, ‘Cloudspotting’ invites an audience of 10 people to enact rest, public rest together and we thought very carefully about how we create that space, so that it’s a very held active rest. It’s interesting we talk about buoyancy or we play with the idea of buoyancy in the piece. Then, your piece is doing something similar, but with a different medium and… yeah, I find that really interesting. How did you come to work with… because I feel like you work with rest and care. Would you say that’s across your practice or is that part of this particular piece?

Ray: No, I think it’s something that I’ve been… yeah, it’s something that I’ve been thinking about for a while and that just comes out of my own, like, having burned out several times and being like, “Oh, actually, I can’t work in the way that I used to. I need to find a way of working at a pace that feels like it fits and it suits me,” and also being able to share that way of working with collaborators and stuff. I suppose, because that’s about, like… yeah, I suppose that burnout is about wanting to make work that speaks to certain things and those things might be partly part of your, like, experience in the world. Actually, how do you keeping fighting a good fight if you don’t have a time to, kind of, recuperate and regalvanise energy in order to move forward?

I think that that’s the thing that I wanted… like, I wanted for myself. So, I also, kind of, put it in the work, because I feel like we’re coming out of, like, you know, I don’t want to say three years post-COVID, but you know what I mean, maybe post the lockdowns, like we say. Actually, that was a force that forced everybody… well, not everyone. Forced a lot of people to have to slow down.

Raquel: Yeah.

Ray: I kept saying that, “I’m not going to go back to work and work in the same toxic [productive 0:06:07] ways that I had been before,” but it’s really hard to hold strong to that when the world keeps trying to push you to move at pace. Yeah.

Raquel: Yeah. I think something we discovered in ‘Cloudspotting’ was that, like, we wanted to invite the audience to rest, so that there’s this powerful mirroring act between you as an audience and the stories that you’re hearing, which are about people trying to rest in public and in cinemas or in lecture halls, but, also, it happens a lot in public toilets. Something we discovered is that rest being such a different mode, we felt like people listened really differently and the stories and the words of the story seem to land in people differently, maybe in a more embodied way.

So, since that project, I’ve been, sort of, trying to make this case for rest as a site of spectatorship and as a site of a place to experience art and to make art from. I wondered what it does… I feel like we both… both your piece, ‘BODIES’, and ‘Cloudspotting’ place the audience in quite a different non-normative, kind of, position or place. I wondered how that changed people’s experience of the work, being placed in water, how that changes the spectatorship or the performance of the form of the piece.

Ray: I think I really connected with the stuff that you were saying about this, kind of, embodiment of the practice of resting and that, actually, that how you’re speaking to how that allows an audience member to connect with the work differently. Particularly when I did the show in London, everybody rushed to get to a venue and you can see that they’re frazzled and, kind of, yeah, through the day, probably because of the journey, but also maybe because of what has happening for them in the rest of the day and then seeing that transformation of they look different, they seem lighter when they come out.

I think or I know that, like, one of the things that I wanted was for… because the themes of the work can be quite heavy, I wanted people to be able to be in the best space or state possible to receive that. I don't know… I mean, it seems like you’re finding that, actually, that idea of giving space for… it’s almost like giving space for, like, contemplation, right?

Raquel: Yeah.

Ray: Like, seems to work really well, where you want to, kind of, share something that’s, like, important or that requires the person to do something with the information once they leave the space.

Raquel: Yeah. I think we felt like… like, our piece is heavy audio, partly because people are resting, so it’s difficult for people to see the performance from where they’re lying down. It’s quite heavily audio, so there’s a lot of, kind of, conjuring that we ask the audience to do. I feel like that asks them to begin to author something, to author a, kind of, version of their city. I guess we’re asking people to place those stories in their own version of the city and I think that that… or I guess my hope is that that then leads to some kind of action when you leave the space, because I guess we’re coming from similar… well, maybe similar in terms of, like, disability justice and climate justice.

Oh, gosh. I had another thought, but I can’t remember what it is now. Something about that different embodied state being a way to build a bridge between one person’s experience and another or as a strategy for how you, like you say, hold someone in a way that they can best hear a story that might be difficult to hear or that they might have quite emotional reactions to, that becomes so much a part of the form of the work.

Ray: I think it’s certainly making me think about, like, how I’ll continue to make work in the future. Already, I’m thinking about taking away some of the learning from this project into the next project, into the next thing that I do.

Raquel: Yeah. What would those be? What would you say those are?

Ray: I think there’s something about working at a much slower pace, where you have time to sit with the work and the choices that you’re making to, kind of, you know, really gauge if they feel right. There’s also something about, like, how I’m holding space for people, that the work now is a container to, kind of, hold space for people. Yes, it’s about… and, essentially, I guess, like, using it as an activist space or an activation space for something, right?

Raquel: Yeah.

Ray: I no longer have to be always at the centre of that space activating it for people, you know, holding space there for some of that work to be done by other people, if that makes sense.

Raquel: Yeah. I love that language you use around an activation space and also that the, kind of… I don't know if it’s a tension or complexity between, yeah, it being an activation state, but within a really restful state, if you know what I mean. Like, yeah, that’s really nice language.

Ray: Yeah, just encouraging that, kind of, slowing down and being present. That’s maybe something about how something starts. I don't know about… yeah.

Raquel: Like, the very seed of the idea for the project or how the performance starts?

Ray: Maybe a bit of both. Like, how it sets the tone for what is to come next. I think, like, ‘BODIES’, the start of that sets the tone for, like, what will… yeah, for what will come next, at least for the first 20 minutes of the work. I don't know if you feel that the same is true of your piece.

Raquel: Yeah. I feel that the first thing we have to do is slow people down and so there’s a journey into the space. Then, there’s a shedding of your everyday things that you leave on a chair, which I guess is similar in ‘BODIES’, if you change your clothes or you leave your things. Then, you’re invited into the space. So, I’d say the first seven minutes are probably about slowing people down, yeah, and, I guess, getting them used to a different tone and rhythm.

It’s interesting that you want to take that into your next project also, because my next project is about time and about, like, exploring time in a, kind of, cubist way from science and art and, I think, thinking about how far we could stretch a long-form residency that will start just with letters over, kind of, three or four months. Yeah. It seems like maybe we’re both interested in the… I don't know. Would you call it, like, a slow approach or a…

Ray: Yeah, I think so. I’ve been applying for lots of residencies recently and they all talk about that space to just work at a much slower pace than I’ve been used to working previously. Yeah.

Raquel: Do you feel like, in this piece, you had… you said, like, having the time to really, kind of, clock the decisions that you’re making. Did you have that time because you decided to give yourself that time or was that because of COVID and things, like…

Ray: I think this project, there are two… the work changed. When I first thought about making this piece, it was when we just went into lockdown. That’s when everything, kind of, got secured and I could start making it. I was like, “Ah. Well, this isn’t going to work. If I want to bring people together in communion in a watery space, now is not the time for that to happen.”

So, I did actually have to make another piece of work that was around the same, sort of, theme-ish, themes-ish of this particular piece, but that was a piece that you would do at home, in the comfort of your own… in your bathroom. So, you would still be in water, but you would do that in your own space. I think there was lots of learning that I took away from that.

So, in some ways, yes, COVID did force a slowing down, but it was a really useful one, because, also, now, there are these, kind of, two pieces of work that can engage people in different ways, depending on, you know, how comfortable they are to be out in public spaces with other people again. Yeah, it just offers something different and both of those… but their starting points are very much, kind of, like, slow and all of those things, the ritual of slowing down, preparing the space, shedding the day’s clothes, putting something else on or not. Like, yeah, it’s quite a vulnerable… if I imagine being naked at home in your bath, it’s quite a vulnerable state to be in to, kind of, experience something.

Raquel: Yeah.

Ray: Yeah.

Raquel: Is this ‘THIRST’, the piece that your… yeah.

Ray: ‘THIRST TRAP’. Yeah, that’s it.

Raquel: Yeah, ‘THIRST TRAP’. Yeah, I tried to watch… I tried to participate when it was part of Unlimited, but I don’t live in London, so, yeah, it didn’t quite work. I want to ask you something about that collective, because, in ‘Cloudspotting’, we ask the audience to enact a collective act of rest, but we also bring together 48 remote performers. So, we’ve got an app that we ask 48 people to use to communicate their rest directly with the audience, so they’re connected to a light and to a sound loop in the installation space. So, the sound that the audience encounter when they first come into the space is this real-time representation of rest and the acts of rest that, normally, we don’t see.

Yeah, I just wondered what you feel like it does in your work to bring, like, the collectivity of… I think you said you wrote something about the space to navigate the entangled and complex relationship you have with the planet and the urgent responsibilities we have to each other, so that collectiveness or togetherness. I don’t know if I’m explaining myself very well.

Ray: For me, there’s something about actually seeing each other. I don't know. I feel like, often, when we’re thinking about climate, it’s happening to the other, it’s not necessarily happening to us. Also, I don’t think that we really spend time, like, clocking each other in the world or really thinking about that. So, I think this slowing down allows for us to, kind of, like, see each other in the space.

So, there’s something in that that’s about a collective responsibility that shouldn’t feel heavy, because it’s also about a collective responsibility to yourself. Whether it is that you walk away from the space being like, “Right, I’m going to write to my local MP,” or whether that is, “Right, I’m going to make sure that I carve out space to be quiet and contemplative.” That’s not a word.

Raquel: Contemplative.

Ray: Yes, that’s the word. Yeah, whether it’s that. There’s just something about, like… maybe it’s just something about choice, like, having a choice, knowing that… or the space to make informed choice and also experiencing something together, like, being in that vulnerable space and place in the pool together.

Raquel: Yeah. I mean, I think creating spaces where we see each other is so powerful.

Ray: I was thinking that, like, was there something in particular that, like, kind of, got you to the place where you wanted to… I know that you said you’ve had lots of experiences of resting in public. Was that the, kind of… yeah, what brought you to, kind of, wanting to make this work at this time?

Raquel: Yeah. There was one particular incident where I triggered a security alert at the Southbank Centre by lying down on the sixth floor. The security team couldn’t, sort of, explain why it was okay to sit on the floor, but not lie down, because there were loads of people sitting down, they had their MacBooks plugged in and stuff like that, but I told them about my, kind of, access needs and they did make the first aid room couch available for 40 minutes. For me, that completely defeated the point, because I went to an arts centre because I wanted to be surrounded by art and people. So, me, it just totally medicalised it, putting me on my own in this room that smelt of antiseptic.

In response to that, I started asking people about whether they had a story about resting in public and we’ve collected, gathered nearly, well, just over 300 stories now and that feels like an important, kind of, archive and just a way of navigating the world that most people don’t think about or don’t have to think about, but, actually, it’s not a few of us, there are a lot of us that navigate the world in a different way for different reasons. I mean, in this case, in this project, it’s mainly to do with chronic illness, and disability and neurodiversity. So, it was that incident that, sort of, prompted me to make this piece. Yeah. How about you? Was there a particular moment?

Ray: I don't know if there was a partic- I don't know what happened and this has been continuing for the last few years now, I just have this real obsession with water. I don't know what it is and just, kind of, clocking it all the time and wanting to be near it. I don't know. I was talking about this recently and I was like, “Oh, is it about the fact that it’s flowing. It flows, right? So, it’s always changing,” and there’s something about that evolution that I’m searching for or something like that. I suppose, largely, it was because, you know, I started to… when I started to… I just had some really interesting conversations with academics when I started making this work, talking about climate and asking really specific questions and not necessarily getting specific… well, getting answers that intrigued me.

Also, I became quite... I don't know. I was really interested in weather. I was thinking about how I feel like the weather has changed. It was quite stormy at one point. This was a few years ago. It just kept being quite stormy and then I… I was just having lots of questions, I had lots of questions. It felt really nice to be in a space where people that know more about this stuff than me were able to answer some of those things. I guess, like, just thinking about where I might have relatives that live in the Global South and how, you know, often, when we hear of things happening, the effects are felt over, I’d say, over there.

Raquel: Yeah.

Ray: Whether that means… yeah, rather than here, but, often, we’re over here, are the ones affecting things happening over there and it’s, like, this, kind of, them and us thing. I just wanted to become… I don't know. I started thinking about the natural world more and how well we’ve lost the ability… well, I think, certainly, I have lost the ability to, like… if you think about ancestors being on the land and knowing more and being able to look at the sky and read what the forecast might be tomorrow because of this certain flower that’s doing this certain thing or just all of these connections being lost.

I, kind of, wanted to be… and I suppose it was off the back of, like, all of these… I guess we’ve just been through a moment with Brexit, and Trump, and all of these things and about, like, dividing, just constantly dividing, and putting up these invisible boundaries between things and, I don't know, water can flow through and around through all of those things. Actually, yeah, like, something about… bring it back to that idea of bodies of water being connected. Like, yeah, that we’re all… I mean, I don’t want to be gross, but, probably, if you think about… yeah.

I just think, yes, but, just generally, it was, kind of, about connectivity and wanting to smash down some of those invisible borders, and allow us to see each other and allow us to reconnect and be… and, also, like, reconnect to the planet, this thing that is sustaining us and won’t be able to sustain us for very much longer if we don’t pull our fingers out.

Raquel: Yeah.

Ray: So, yeah, lots of time to think and lots of… yeah. Then, just, kind of, distilling and distilling down into this idea that is like, “Okay. So, this is the way that I think we could talk about this.”

Raquel: While you were talking, it made me think, like, that thing about water always changing and the truth in that. I feel like people who live with chronic illness also know that truth, that there is no static stable identity, because we have bodies that are much more precarious and, yeah, those underlying truths that we’ve forgotten, like, forgetting how to read the weather or read the stars. Yeah.

Also, what you were saying about, yeah, how much distance and wedge issues, and you’re right, it’s easy to forget that, yeah, there has been a very polarised right-wing politics that affects us, yeah, it affects us like everything else. Yeah. I suppose I don’t know if this is naïve of me, but I feel like I want theatre to be a place that connects us and a place where we can turn towards these more difficult things together and have time to consider them, as well as being about, I don't know, entertainment or, kind of, different types of virtuosity. I want theatre to be that also.

As you were talking, it also reminded me that one of my favourite things about making work is being able to follow these threads of something that you’re obsessed about. In making ‘Cloudspotting’, I got completely obsessed with gravity and, like, completely read every book on gravity. I didn’t necessarily understand everything that I could find. That’s a real joy to then, kind of, put that into the work, to pass on, yeah, some of what I learnt about that, but, also, asking the audience to make this imaginative leap to, kind of, orbit with these different characters, one of them being, like, out in space. What’s your favourite thing about making work or about making this work?

Ray: I mean, that. That, kind of, like… I always have these, like… they’re huge. I only ever describe mine as looking, like… you know, I always think of The Matrix. I don't know which character it is that has got the board and they’re, like, shoving things out and then bringing them back in. I guess it’s just like a big screen. That’s what I feel like my brain does when it’s in work mode and I, kind of, love it. It gets really expansive, really, really expansive. I start being able to read these things and go off on this little tangent here. I’ve spent a lot of time thinking about the different types of wakes in waters and how you can move the water and reading, like, all of this chitter-chatter that I was having with, kind of, the academics and then the meaning.

Then, yeah, like you say, being able to be like, “Argh, my brain’s full of all of this stuff. How do I make it make sense to somebody else? What are those bits of knowledge that I get to share and pass on to other people?” I think that’s the most exciting bit, for me. Also, kind of, the moment of when you have this, like… when I have this, what would be a random idea to put 24 people in a pool together and have them move around the space and activate the water in this different way.

Often, I feel like… I don't know if it’s the same with you. Often, I feel it’s really hard for me to talk about the work, but, then, the moment when it all comes together and you see it, it’s just like, “Wah.” It’s like, “Oh, it was all worth it and I knew that it would do the thing that I wanted it to do,” because this was me, like, not relying on myself in the space to, kind of, convey this message, but rely on, I guess, like, my instincts to know that even if I’m not in the work, it will feel like something that is… that I will have made and it’s giving you all of the things that I might have given you as that vessel, as that material in the work. So, yeah, that’s the bit that I love, the research-y… the bit where I get to geek out.

Raquel: Yeah, geeking out. I guess I also just have, like, a… I love rehearsal rooms, for some reason. I love rehearsal rooms, they’re, like, my favourite places in the world to be and empty theatres, love them, but, yeah, the geeking out is definitely a…

Ray: Yeah. Having conversations with, like, collaborators and them geeking out of your geeking out, or when somebody really gets it and then you’re both like, “Ah,” just firing the ideas. It’s just really nice.

Raquel: Do you find the distilling process difficult? I can find that process quite painful.

Ray: I mean, the ADHD brand wants it all.

Raquel: Right.

Ray: “Put it all in there. Why not give it all?”

Raquel: Five different versions of the show.

Ray: Yes, please. Yeah, I find that difficult, but, sometimes, I really like it when instinct kicks in and it just says, “No, it’s this. It’s this,” and you, kind of, like, go towards that, often, because I feel like my brain’s so muddled with other decision-making out in the world more generally, when it speaks to me, like, when I’m in creativity mode, sometimes I just know that it’s this thing, it’s this before this or, you know… and, also, yeah, I really enjoy working in collaboration with people, like, I love that. I love sharing, and chatting and bouncing around, bouncing off of each other. Yeah, I love all of that stuff.

Raquel: Who was your main collaborator on this show?

Ray: Gosh.

Raquel: Or did you have lots of collaborators?

Ray: I feel like there were lots of collaborators. There was a director that I was collaborating with, a musician, a movement artist. So, it was really nice, I really like when people are coming from these different places and we’re just trying to, like, you know, see the whole and also the projection designer. So, yeah, it has been really nice to, like… yeah, it’s just really nice to offer somebody, I don't know, like, a little crumb and they come away and they give back a whole biscuit, something like this.

Raquel: I don't know if that’s a good place to end, but, I mean, I can’t wait to experience your piece. It’ll definitely be one of the three things that I definitely have to do around all the other stuff that we’re doing.

Ray: Ditto. Getting yours on there. Can’t…

Raquel: Lovely. Great.

Ray: I think it’s just really exciting, because I can just feel like there’s just so much crossover, which is really, really nice.

Raquel: Yeah.

Ray: Really interesting. Yeah.

Raquel: Yeah, likewise. Yeah, I can’t wait to see it, experience it. Really nice to meet you, Ray, ahead of being up there. Yeah.

Ray: Yeah. You too. We’ll have to find some time to actually meet in real life, in person.

Raquel: I’d love that.

Ray: Do something nice and relaxing.

Raquel: Yeah. Can we go and get an ice cream together?

Ray: Oh, my God. Yes, please.

Raquel: Apparently, there’s a really nice ice cream shop.

Ray: Oh, yeah.

Raquel: Yeah.

Ray: Okay.

Raquel: There are probably several, but I’d love that. Thank you.

Ray: Alright. Me too. It’s a date. Ice cream.

Raquel: It’s a date. Nice.

Female: This recording was edited by Jason Crouch. Horizon is commissioned by Arts Council England and delivered by Battersea Arts Centre, FABRIC, Fierce, GIFT, MAYK and Transform. Horizon Radio.

END AUDIO

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