

Hiding in Plain Sight w/ Peppur Chambers-Soraci & Diana Burbano

- Veralyn Jones: Welcome to Writers Revealed, a podcast from LA-based BIPOC-theatre company, Lower Depth Theatre. This podcast emerged from our monthly series Writers Revealed, which presents a personal and stunningly honest look at the writer behind the words and the person behind the page. Each month, we invite two new writers to read their own work - whether that's an excerpt from a play, novel, poem, essay, or something else entirely. After the readings, writer/producer/EDI facilitator, L Trey Wilson leads the two writers through an engaging discussion - a deep dive into everything from their writing process to unique ways in which the world informs and inspires their work. To learn more about our writers, please visit our show notes or our official website lower-depth.com. We hope you enjoy Writers Revealed.
- Courtney Olipha...: On this episode of Writers Revealed, writer and producer, Peppur Chambers-Soraci reads an excerpt from her novella, *HARLEM'S AWAKENING*. You'll then hear playwright and teaching artist, Diana Burbano, reads from her essay that examines her inspiration for writing the play, *CALIBAN'S ISLAND*. Followed by a discussion moderated by L. Trey Wilson.
- Lower Depth The...: The following selection comes from *Harlem's Awakening*, a novel by Peppur Chambers. Copyright © 2021 Peppur Chambers.
- Peppur Chambers: Her delicate fingers desperately reached for the smooth pear handle of the pistol hidden under her pillow. She'd stolen it from her mother's bureau earlier that morning in the event that what was happening right now tonight could be stopped from happening ever again. From underneath the pillow, she held the gun, feeling its cool reassurance of freedom in her hand. She laid in a trance as she looked at the tear-drop crystals which dangled from the chandelier lamp on her night stand. The light had not been turned on this evening. There was no need to illuminate anything at the moment. Still, in the dark, she could make out the cluster of crystals. She could hear them, better still. They clinked against one another lightly as though there were a gentle earthquake. Clink. Clink. Clink. She would count how many times one crystal would kiss another as she disappeared into a fantastic ballroom where each counted clink became her first step in a pique turn of a romantic ballet waltz. ...twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six... she'd count and twirl until the pacing of the clinks no longer matched the slow pace of the melodic, rhythmic lullaby she sang to herself in her head for her dance. The nightstand was built into her bed; otherwise she probably would have moved it further away. With her right hand under her pillow and clasping the pearl handle, she steadied the chandelier with her left. The waltz had stopped. So had the music. The crystals were banging into one another now and she didn't want them to break. She squeezed her eyes shut tightly. And waited. Her bed squeaked incessantly, fervently, violently. She much more preferred the clink over the squeak. But, she hadn't much choice. And then it stopped. She turned her head and released the base of the lamp so she could cover her face with her arm to ward off his sweat as he fell forward and grunted in her ear. He

sounded like the hogs on her granddad's farm as they hunted for fermented orange rinds. She knew the grunt all too well. He was through. And so was she. As he dismounted her like an old farm horse, he breathlessly praised her for being a good girl as he tied his pajamas. She slowly pulled herself up and onto her knees. Both hands gripped her salvation. She called his name, "Daddy..." Even in the distorted silvery moonlight, she could see the belittling amusement in his fifty-two year old eyes. "Guess you ain't as good a girl as I thought," he said. "No. I. Ain't," She pulled the trigger. His body reeled backwards and with a neck-breaking thud, he hit her pale orange sherbet bedroom wall. This was an accent color her culturally aware, yet morally blind mother, Susannah had insisted Harlem accept for her "boudoir". Harlem assumed her mother never imagined how it would look against her father's trail of tomato-red blood. Roy slid down the wall. She pulled the trigger again. And again. And again. She felt herself shrieking, but could hear nothing until her mother's voice jolted her from wherever her subconscious mind had pulled her. "STOP IT!! STOP IT!!", Susannah screamed. (It was too late, of course). Susannah stood frozen in the doorway. Her heavy breathing was the only sound. Her chiffon night gown cascaded around her lithe figure. She looked like a beautiful, bronze, soulless statue. Susannah threw on the light which revealed the genealogical beauty of both women and the ugly that lay dead before them. "What have you done?" Susannah whispered. "Momma?" "We were working through this. He said...he said this was the last time..." She said; the words trickling out of her like rusty water in a clogged spigot. "I couldn't wait." Susannah ushered, "Bring me the gun." "Momma, I can't" Harlem replied. Her mind wanted to obey her mother, but her body wouldn't respond because to do that, Harlem would have to step over her dead father's body. And that was something she did not want to do. "BRING IT TO ME!!" Susannah shouted. Those were the last words her mother ever said to her. Harlem unraveled herself from her bed and sidestepped her way to her mother; her bare feet tip toeing around Roy's lifeless body in the dark. Her mother outstretched her hand and Harlem felt the softness of it as she placed the gun there. Susannah's pale grey eyes looked past Harlem into nothingness. Even in this state, her skin, the color of sandpaper, but nowhere near its roughness, was beautiful. Her hair, loosened from the braid that hung down her back, was tinged with forty three years' worth of coarse silver strands of experience. Experiences like Harlem's breech birth twenty-five years ago. Reactive experiences to unending disappointments in decisions she'd made and hadn't made. And experiences like today. Susannah had been a fighter. She'd been a woman who could say "No" in several languages and with the emphatic strength of ten men. Her parents had raised her to be such and given her every opportunity to be such. It was their family way. Roy had taken her strength; or maybe, over time, she'd carelessly given it away. She hated being weak. Hated what it had done to her. Hated whom she'd become. She'd stopped rationalizing the validity of her existence the day after she discovered what Roy had been doing to her beautiful daughter because that was the first day that she did nothing. That day, those seeds of hate sprouted in her quickly and spread through her veins like the disease Roy was. It ate her alive and she relished the experience of the pain she deserved. She lived in that pain as she knew Harlem lived in hers. But living was becoming too much. She was too weak. She'd tried to hold on; she'd been dangling from the ledge of her life for too long and her fingers were drained of strength. As Susannah waited for the gun and stood in

the home that her family built and she helped destroy, she felt the first finger gladly release its hold. Then the next and then next until one by one, each finger let go. She was relieved because her fingers had been holding dead, diseased weight far too long. "Momma...?" Harlem stood there as she watched her mother take the pistol instead of her. Harlem absently wiped the wetness from her bare foot onto a dry part of the rug as she knew she'd stepped in Roy's blood. Her mother turned from her and left. Harlem stepped forward and watched Susannah, lithe and troubled, walk gingerly, oddly down the hallway. The white chiffon floated as she walked and made her look like a ghost in the shadows as she reached the bathroom and closed the door. Harlem followed slowly. She imagined she was stepping in the exact same places that her mother just had. She imagined her mother's soles had left something for her in the plush burgundy rugs that lined the highly polished wood floors. Somehow, Harlem wanted to take from those rugs what she had not been given: Warmth. Guidance. Support. Her mother loved this hallway. It was her favorite of all the hallways in their very large home. Susannah had painstakingly decorated its oak paneled walls with carefully framed photos of her own parents, whom she adored. They'd worked hard for her, their only child. They were overjoyed when she married Roy, whom she'd met on a family trip to New York City to visit an uncle. They'd said he was a "Good man. A hard-working, very good man!" and rewarded her enough money to keep her comfortable for a lifetime. Her grandfather, Susannah's father, had been the founder of the only bank in Greensboro (and several counties), while her grandmother imported fine linens to Greensboro for the upward women of the South. Soon after Roy and Susannah married, and when Harlem was born, the golden-est child of the golden children, they had given them more money. However, as is often the case, money couldn't save them from debauchery. Roy had grown up on a farm and knew how to change a horse's shoe. In New York, he'd learned how to fix people's shoes. That's what had made him a hard workin' man. But once Susannah's family money started coming, he stopped fixing shoes, because, as Harlem had often heard him repeat, "Why the hell am I busting my ass for you when your parents don't give me a reason to?" Roy and Susannah had left New York and moved to this home where Susannah's parents had raised her. There were never any other children to fill the home. No other diversions besides Harlem, the child who was named for the city in which they met and the child Susannah hoped would be enough to spark their mismatched marriage. As is often the case, Harlem wasn't enough and Roy and Susannah soon did nothing but find ways to not look at one another. Unfortunately, Roy was held high in Susannah's father's eyes, and could do no wrong. Even when he was. Somehow, someway, somewhere along about when Harlem turned twelve, and her beautiful golden-brown body became beautiful, Roy took notice in the wrong kinda way. Susannah had thought that if she politely ignored this grotesque bit of "activity", an experience that consumed their household like mold on cheese, that it would all go away. (Harlem knew all of this because it had all been written in her mother's journal, which she'd read, many, many times.) But, the ugly didn't go away. Couldn't. Because Roy didn't want it to. That is why, while she stood outside the bathroom door, Harlem knew that her mother stepped into her favorite porcelain bathtub, turned on her favorite silver faucet that willingly unleashed a stream of scalding hot water and drew her favorite pistol to her head and shot herself.

Lower Depth The...: The following selection is from an essay penned by Diana Burbano.

Copyright: Shakespeare and Latinidad, edited by Trevor Boffone and Carla Della Gatta, published by Edinburgh University Press. Part II: Making Shakespeare Latinx Caliban's Island: Gender, Queerness and Latinidad in Theatre for Young Audiences, Diana Burbano

Diana Burbano: I am an immigrant. I was born in Colombia, and my family emigrated to Cleveland, Ohio in the mid 70's. My family were the only Spanish speakers in the area. I was forced to learn English as quickly as possible. My mother struggled, I being younger, had an easier time of it. I sat in front of the TV and absorbed English from Alaina Reed on Sesame Street and Morgan Freeman and Rita Moreno on Electric company. I loved language as a child, I loved the odd, hard, tongue twisting English consonants. The crunch of them, the howl of the diphthongs. Unfortunately, I also had a severe lisp, and could barely make myself understood in either language. I got plopped into theatre classes to help with my English, my shyness, and my speech. I was introduced to Shakespeare as a freshman in High school. We worked on Romeo and Juliet, which was a slog. To my dyslexic eyes it was as impossible to read as it was to understand. It didn't click until our teacher, Mrs Mack, wheeled in the old AV unit and popped in a videotape. Some dude came onstage, and I rolled my eyes in anticipated boredom. Then he started a riff, playing Romeo AND Juliet, making those words sing in a way I didn't know was possible. It was Ian McKellan's Acting Shakespeare. I was riveted. Mr McKellan flew through characters with nothing more than a change of posture and that gorgeous voice. Unfortunately, we only got to watch 45 minutes of the tape, and then the bell rang. This happened for four years in a row. I only saw the end of the show when several years later Mr McKellan played San Francisco and I was lucky enough to be one of his onstage corpses. Listening to that gorgeous Baritone sing "Once more unto the breach —" cemented my love both for McKellan and for the bard. Much to my immigrant parent's disappointment, I decided to study acting. The truth was, due to my learning disabilities I was a massive failure in school, I couldn't have gotten into "a good school" even if I had taken the SAT. Which I didn't, in spite of telling my parents I had. There was no way I was going to put myself through the humiliation of taking the test and failing. I had fantastic language skills however, and I loved to be onstage. I had an affinity for speaking the speech. Shakespeare became my passion. I was lucky enough to have instructors who believed in me, and who gave me wonderful, challenging roles. I played La Pucelle, Lady Anne, Macbeth's first witch. I adored the language. The power of the word. The power of his words in my mouth I became a professional actor, and in spite of my classical training. (I studied Shakespeare at the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre of Great Britain.) I got my Equity card, doing Theatre for Young Audiences and TYA was the theatrical form I worked in the most in my career as a stage actor. Opportunities to work in classical theatre were few and far between for a young Latinx woman. TYA offers some of the only opportunities to work professional as a performer of color. I started in at the Bilingual Foundation for the Arts, where we performed for children 4th grade and under, mostly from impoverished backgrounds, ESL learners. Children for whom theatre was not a part of their lives. I found this work exhausting, frustrating, and extremely fulfilling. I lived for the change in the children's eyes

as they started to buy into a story. The way the atmosphere in the room shifted and grew with a good performance was magical. The tired teachers would thank us, and tell us over and over again, "They've never seen a play before, sorry if they were noisy." They WERE noisy. Engaged, worried about the characters, yelling at the bad guy, rolling their eyes at the sappy stuff. They also were honest, and told you right away if they thought something was stupid or more accurately, dishonest. The late 90's was a time when every TYA had a badly written "rap" shoehorned into the show, and the kids did NOT approve. I've performed TYA in multimillion dollar theatres and dirty cafeteriums. I'm proud of my time in the kid's theatre trenches. Kids appreciate a good story. They don't behave like jaded subscribers, and the kids I performed for were, for the most part, children of color, and they needed us. I loved being able to entertain them. One thing that stuck out to me is that theatre seems to abandon the kids after 10-11. The plays I performed were always geared to younger children. Perhaps that is what the grants that paid for the performances specified. I always felt that we did a major disservice to both the kids, and the theatre, by not trying to connect with the, admittedly more cynical, more difficult, Middle School aged kid. After many years in the theatre as an actor, I tired of the paucity of interesting roles for Latinx women and decided to write my own. The first play that I wrote was a TYA, Caliban's Island. "Characters from Shakespeare's TWELFTH NIGHT and THE TEMPEST intertwine when a set of twins is shipwrecked on an island. As the siblings race to reunite, they encounter a young girl with magical powers, a deceptively cute fairy, and a horned monster with a heart of gold. CALIBAN'S ISLAND explores the struggle between wishes, dreams and wisdom. Bring the entire family to this witty, whimsical celebration of language and life. Part PETER AND THE STAR CATCHER, part Shakespeare, Burbano writes with a unique voice all her own." --Headwaters: Creede Rep's New Play Program I began working on "Caliban's Island" because I was nagged by the idea that Theatre for Young Audiences in the US neglects students in Middle School. I wanted to work on a piece for older kids that touched on themes of gender identity, "Othering" and accepting that what makes you weird makes you special. I chose to work on adapting characters from Shakespeare. Caliban's Island is a mash up of Shakespeare characters, and tropes. There are twins, a terrible storm, an island with magical beings. "A storm shipwrecks a young girl named Vi on a deserted island. A peculiar creature of indeterminate species named Cal is watching her as she awakes from her ordeal. He claims to have rescued Vi from certain death at sea. Vi is grateful to him, but her twin brother, Bast, is still missing, and she cannot rest until he is found." Vi is the hero of the story, in spite of the fact that Joseph Campbell said women don't get to have hero stories because "they are the end of the journey." Vi is fighting against sexism and gender norms. She is having on a difficult quest and there is no romance at the end of it, because she has to save her beloved brother. He is in distress and he needs her. Shakespeare wrote wonderful roles for women, and that certainly appealed to me as a young person. Viola is brilliant, able and also vulnerable and funny. She's allowed to be a whole person, not a simple damsel in distress, and she guides her own journey. Shakespeare's Viola does find love at the end of Twelfth Night, but my Vi doesn't. I have nothing against a good love story, but I wanted to explore a journey between people who have more on their minds than their hearts. These characters are all fighting to be allowed to live authentic lives and not be shoehorned into the roles society expects them to

play. I reclaimed Caliban. His description as a monster was uncomfortably familiar to me. He was othered, an outsider, different thus dangerous. I certainly related to that. I came to the US as a child, unable to speak English. I tried, worked hard, but I always felt different, uncomfortable. I failed miserably at school, because of learning disabilities that made concentration difficult. I brought home one bad report card after another. I also got into trouble because, having been a victim of molestation at a very young age, I was acting out my sexuality in "Inappropriate" ways. I became an outcast, both at school and in my family. The way Caliban is treated in "The Tempest", as if he is stupid, as if he had no right to education or sexuality, seemed unfair and short sighted. And made me, perhaps unfairly, dislike Prospero, the adult interfering, controlling and thus taking the joy out of magic. "Enter Mira, a lonely, vain, arrogant and very bossy young girl who herself was shipwrecked on the island as a baby. The fairy Fluffy has been her primary companion ever since. Mira thinks Vi would make an amusing playmate, so she casts a spell and takes her prisoner." I wanted to work on relationships between girls. In popular media, young girls are encouraged to be catty to each other, in a way that reinforces patriarchal dominance. Young women can't be allies to one another because young women can't be friends with each other. Vi and Mira are unique young women, who at first seem to have nothing in common, but who learn to work together and to respect one another. Both have unique talents that they use, Vi with ease and Mira only after being given permission. Mira's gifts are too powerful, frightening, for a young girl. She feels shame for her abilities and tries to hide them. I teach students in 5th-6th grade. The change that happens to girls as they turn into tweens and teens is marked. They often go from being strong, bossy and outspoken, to becoming shy, afraid to speak out, afraid to seem smarter than the boys. They sexualize, they start to get looks and comments about their bodies and faces, and they lose the freedom they had in childhood. Their bodies mature much faster than their minds and confusion, anger and anxiety begin to play a bigger role in their lives. Mira embodies their confusion and their quicksilver personality changes. Fluffy is a kid's version of Ariel, and they are a gender fluid fairy. I make use of the they/them pronouns. The other characters don't quite know what to make of Fluffy. They are not quite sure what They is, and whether They are servile, feral or sentient. Mira has trapped Fluffy. She commands Them to do her bidding. Fluffy is misnamed, misgendered and enslaved. "Cal has found the missing Bast but he is near death. Cal knows that only Mira possesses the magical powers to revive him. Still furious with Cal, Mira only reluctantly agrees -- on the condition Cal be banished from her forever, and that this time Bast will become her personal play thing. With impressive magical prowess, she saves Bast's life. Mira's scheme is foiled once again: Bast escapes, this time with the help of Fluffy. " Bast is Vi's twin brother, a Shakespearean trope that I use to emphasize both character's discomfort with their gender norms. Where Vi is fierce, feisty, adventurous (read masculine), Bast is gentle, shy, and scholarly, a boy happier in his study reading, instead of practicing swordplay with his sister. I imagine the fights with his father, and the guilt that Bast must feel for not living up to his role in a patriarchal society. "With Cal's help, Vi and Bast devise a way to escape the island, to return to the world of "normal" human society. Mira wants to come with them, but Cal, in his wisdom, knows how dangerous that would be for her: mankind would not treat kindly her astonishing magical powers. Only when she has learned to suppress and

control them could she hope to survive in that world. Mira sees the truth in Cal's word, and awakens to the fact he loves her and wants only to protect her. She is nevertheless disappointed, so to mitigate her sadness and loneliness, she takes a forgetting potion. Vi and Bast sail away towards home." There isn't a "happy" ending. I felt that tying things up in a neat bow would be a disservice to middle school aged kids. They have a deeper understanding of the vicissitudes of life. My love of language and Shakespeare wrought this play. I am bilingual, proficient in both languages, and fluid in both. I like large complicated words. Tom Stoppard is an immigrant playwright for whom English is a gleefully acquired language, and the way he examines and manipulates English delights me. I sometimes use words "wrong" because I like the placement, the feel of them. I think because, like Stoppard, I am also an autodidact, and hence never learned "The rules." I paint in words with abandon. I am a Latinx playwright, so anything I write would be considered a Latinx play. Or would it? Caliban's Island isn't explicitly Latinx in its conception or characterization. TYA-Land may be the only theatrical form in America where "diverse" casting is the norm. I had a development reading of the piece with Breath of Fire Latina theatre Ensemble in Santa Ana, CA. The entire cast was Latinx performers, with classical training. I emphasize in the notes that the cast should be people of color, but will it be? As someone who often was frozen out of opportunities because of my ethnicity, I fear that casting may default to the majority. I ask my actors to really use their mouths and their lips. I want a heightened, British sense of language. I feel that Latinx actors have not been encouraged to use their voices in big, theatrical ways. They have been asked to flatten their accents, to be understood. Going back to Ian McKellen, he uses his own natural dialect, a beautiful Mancusian lilt that he employs to great effect. I love to hear the musical Latinx dialects really bite into the English language and reclaim it with their own music intact. No flattening to be understood, but a glorious dive into the different vowel sounds, the lips and trills. The natural dialect enhances elevated language into truthfulness and it is my hope that actors who perform in my work feel able to use their natural voices in big compelling ways. Caliban's Island was written as a way for middle schoolers to engage with Shakespearean language and tropes, while centering the issues that most affect them. The play was chosen for Creede Repertory's Headwaters Festival and is published by YouthPLAYS. I believe the work is successful as well as accessible, and I am proud of it. I hope that in spite of it not seeming to be explicitly a "Latinx play", it is understood that because I am Latinx that my Latinidad permeates the work. I would be honored to hear in 10-15 years, that a production of this piece has set another young immigrant on a path to become a writer.

L. Trey Wilson: Hi, how are you both? First off, thank you so much for participating tonight. Both of the pieces that you shared were so stunning. Um, Peppur. Can you hear me? Okay.

Peppur Chambers: I can hear you and I can read the subtitles. I'm good.

L. Trey Wilson: Okay, great. Because I want to start with my massacring of your intro, but I want because I want to dive into something that really resonates for both of you and for me as well, what it actually said was, um, Harlem's Awakening is a piece which highlights and raises black women into new roles as they tackle issues.

Peppur had yet to see in the theater. And it seems like that's something that both of you have in common you're about breaking molds, creating new roles, uh, new identities for what the presumed perpetuated identities had been. I'd love to start with that. Uh, Peppur. Can you share a little bit more about that?

Peppur Chambers: Yes. And I love what you said and I love Diana's piece because I think our heads are in the same place. I absolutely was sick of not seeing any female heroes. I was sick of like, why do we always do the same thing? And I, and the story doesn't have to be good. Like my story's not about good stuff, but it's, it's multiple layers. And then, and there is about friendship and, and, and I learned that by having beautiful black women as my own friends, like I'm the only girl in my family. And that, that also sprayed me, like, what, what is it like to talk about female friendships and good ones, you know, good ones and where we have to help each other. So, number one, I am still thankful for that. We are together Diana and absolutely those themes have been swirling around me for a long time.

Diana Burbano: I was so taken by your piece Peppur. I was so like right in that world, um, I only, we only got a certain amount, so I'm like, this is definitely what I'm going to go out. And like, I have to get this book. Um, yes. Right. Because it's, so, it's so interesting. And that quote I did about Joseph Campbell saying that women are the end of the journey. I mean, I couldn't, like what is that supposed to mean? You know? That we can't have a hero's journey of our own. So I'm, I'm really, I love the, the confluence of that with what we're doing. It's exciting.

Peppur Chambers: Love it.

L. Trey Wilson: It sounds like what that means is that women are just in service to the man's dream. Um, one thing that I just to piggyback on what Diana said, Peppur, in terms of your sharing, I wrote down so many of the things that you language that were just astounding to hear. Uh, and I also wrote down that I, I found you did such an amazing job of having beauty and softness in relation to roughness and ugliness. I mean, it was just, it was fascinating and it was so visual. Oh my gosh. I was seeing everything you described-- that chandelier. Oh my gosh. An EV everything, the wallpaper, the house, it was, it was amazing. It was a beautiful, uh, descriptive way that it just gave me so many perceptions about what it was. What did it look like? Who they looked like, how they were, can you share about that? Is that something you've always been skilled at or able to tell me more about that?

Peppur Chambers: Always? I don't know, but thank you. First of all. And secondly, I think I've learned description. Well, I'm a very visual person. I'm a very detailed person. I'm the type of person I'm in the car with my husband and like, oh my God, did you just see, did you see that person on the side of the road in the green shirt? He's like, no, I didn't. Yeah. But they were there, you know, so I'm already noticing everything and I'm already putting something in context. And then I'm so thankful for my acting training, because learning from acting perspective, number one, like Diana, obviously we know, like I knew what to give my characters to do and what they needed to see in order to do, but it definitely acting, uh, really opened up how I describe things. And, and I do love words. I

love, I love people being able to feel wallpaper and wood and, you know, and be there right with me. It gives me so much joy. And, and it's something I challenge myself to. That was another thing, reading stuff. And I'm like, why is everyone say the door is brown? Or if someone's like the girl's brown or skin was the color of mocha. Well, there's other Browns. So there's other ways to say that something is brown. So I kind of, I always challenged myself. How can I say it another way? And that also gets me into more description, descriptive language.

L. Trey Wilson: Nice. And Diana, speaking of acting and theater. Oh my gosh. You talking about the TYA work brought me back. It took me right back to being involved in that. I did that as well. And I did it also for the, I mean, the, one of the things I'm going to just highlight is you're sharing about the teachers of the schools that you went to, and then like, really glad that you're there. And that was something that was so positive almost like they were like a day off. Um, and that was, and I did it for, I would do it for Manhattan theater club for Rikers Island and go to. Yeah. For incarcerated, incarcerated youth. And that was a fascinating as well. So tell us more about the TYA work.

Diana Burbano: Yeah. Well, it really was where I got my start and it was where I did the most work and I got vested in the union. I mean, it was a really, really a valuable way to work. And of course I complained about it incessantly, right. Because it's really hard how early you have to get up and how like on, you have to be at 7:50 in the morning, you know? Um, but, but it really was true that that was like the only time I ever saw brown people in the audience of these, you know what I mean? Like if you work in some of the bigger theaters, you look at it and it's a sea of people who don't look anything like me. And, um, so I could never really, like I always said, yeah, no, this is good because I'm talking to kids like little Latino kids, little Mexican kids who, it's cool, because like we get each other, even if this is really, there's a lot of stuff to drive me crazy and I never sleep. And our piano player is a little drunk and it's all like crazy, but I mean, we get so many stories. Oh my gosh, I'm sure you do too, but we can move on past that.

L. Trey Wilson: It's so fascinating. As, as, as you shared in your essay, is that, that was one of the few avenues where you felt there was viable work as a Latinx woman.

Diana Burbano: It was, you know, I, I spent a long time as an actor thinking that I wasn't very good. You know what I mean, a long time, because I thought I was well-trained, I did have good training. And I thought I knew my pieces and I kept wondering why the hell am I not getting work when all my peers are getting work, why am I not getting work? And so it took a very long time for me to say, you know, there was just something about you that didn't translate, literally that didn't translate to what they were seeing. You're not this type or that type. You're not easy to categorize because when I got older and luckily now, you know, we're finally doing like some LatinX theater and I'm working like all the time, because there's actually roles for women like me. Do you know what I mean? So that was part of it. That was part of the, but TYA, they wanted us. They wanted people who look like me and, and, and wrote good roles, even, even, you know, some, some, some of the stuff was, you know, a little cheesy, but some of it was really good. Like José Cruz González has a bunch of great TYAs. And, um, they did Wrinkle in Time as a TYA, So sometimes it's a really, it's really good material too.

L. Trey Wilson: Yeah. Fantastic. Well, well, I mean, these segues are perfect. I just want the audience to know that we didn't do this deliberately, but that segue leads me into some beautiful writing. And that starts with Peppur. I wrote down some things that you said, sayings that just resonated so well, "her voice was like rusty water in a clogged spigot. It was like, it just, it just said it all right there. This other one that you said, "decisions she'd made, or hadn't made that resulted in days like today", that that was so powerful, this whole idea of this choices that we make and what they accumulate into them, what they culminate into was so powerful. Can you share a little bit about that and in your thinking around them, lovely language things.

Peppur Chambers: Oh my gosh, I'm an emotional person. I always start crying. That's those two pieces, those two lines, especially the decisions that always makes me cry. So part of it is, um, you know, I'm influenced by my mom quite a bit. My mom wrote poetry. She was the one that gave me my first journal and had me start writing things down. And so she also taught me like how to get into the words. And so, but also, you know, background, like my parents are divorced and my mom gave us, gave her custody of us to my dad at one point. And it was that moment. I, she later as an adult, she's like, I made some decisions, you know, and at times I made decisions when I didn't make, when I should have. And when I didn't, and that line makes me think about her quite a bit. And I think that's what makes me emotional, but, um, there's that, and then the S the spigot of like, man, like, we all know what that's like, like just breastfeeding. So, yeah. But, um, no, thank you for, for that part, because it is an, and, and, you know, we're so influenced by so many things that I love that, that I have my mom, that, that I've gotten that part of her, you know, in me. And, and so that's where it comes from.

L. Trey Wilson: Well, once again, you said something that leads into my next question to Diana which I also loved, oh my gosh, your passion around Shakespeare and IanMcKellen was palpable. And let me just say one more thing. Your imitation of Ian McKellen was right on point. I was like, good. Wasn't it. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Diana Burbano: He really was. He really was the first person I ever heard do it on that. And then I, I have followed him every time I can see him on stage. I go, I, I saw, um, the acting Shakespeare. I've seen his A Night out in LA. I've seen him do Richard III. I just, luckily he's, I get to see him a lot. And there's just something, what I really love about him that really, besides the fact that he's, you know, he's a, he's a terrific actor. He's, he's so fun to watch. He's one of those actors who like, he lets you in on the joke, and yet he's still deep in, I just think that's magic. But he, um, what I really loved is that he used his own voice, right? I mean, he's got this really heavy Northern dialect, which you can understand perfectly fine, but it's still there. And I thought he might be one of the first people that I sort of, once I started like listening to other Shakespeare actors, you know, they all, they were all singing at the time. Right. They all had that sort of thing that, that lyrical thing. But he never did that. He had a beautiful voice and he had music in his voice, but it was like, it felt real to me.

L. Trey Wilson: Yeah, me too. I love watching him. He's so engaging and entertaining and just fun,

Diana Burbano: So fun.

L. Trey Wilson: And so you were a corpse in one of the pieces? I can't leave this conversation without hearing about that.

Diana Burbano: Okay. So at the very end of acting Shakespeare, he does the "once more unto the breach, dear friends", speech. And, um, he calls, he calls up people from the audience and, you know, you, you raise your hand and of course, or at least I thought everybody was going to be raising their hands, but I was the only little idiot going "me, me, me!" and he calls you up and he sort of places you on stage and, and he uses, he drapes you around as a dead body. And then he does the whole, he does the speech just with your dead bodies around and walking over you. I mean, I mean, and that baritone just like rumbling through your body as you're. Oh, it was just cool. It was very, very cool.

L. Trey Wilson: That's amazing. Um, I also wrote down, um, one other thing that you said Pepper in yours, which was no need to eliminate anything. And the thing that was so stunning and captivating about the section that you read is that you kept revealing things. Uh, during that part that was, were surprised on surprise, surprise that kinda had me go back and forth between, oh, this is lovely. Oh, this is tragic, but this beautiful. Oh, that's horrible. I mean, the way you maneuver that or manage that was so I just thought fascinatingly great.

New Speaker: ****

Peppur Chambers: Thank you. Thank you. I love it. And I, it, it, it's also the thing about the visual and it, and it is about, um, I knew that I was trying to shine the light on something. I just subconsciously knew it. I'm like, and it wasn't so much peeling back layers, but literally like, what is this light bulb here? It is here. It is, here it is. And the whole piece is like that. And where were the rest of the book is like that, where we're just, we keep learning more. And, and I think again, like, that's us as people, we're not who you see first. You're not who you hear for, you know, there's just layers and putting light on lights on us and seeing who we really are and segwaying a little to what Diana, you said before about when you thought you were a bad actor and you know, the same thing I studied in New York and I wasn't getting roles and I'm like, is it me?

Peppur Chambers: I'm not working hard enough. And, you know, thank God we had our other lots of fall back on, but thank God we had this other things that we could eliminate about ourselves and, and, and, and still keep storytelling because otherwise we would have quit, you know, and, and that maybe I'll tell you, you had the same experience and that would have just stopped, but I'm so glad that we were able to find ourselves in another way. And that's, and that's part of it too, is like, man, you're only seeing one side of this. Just keep looking, turn on the gosh, darn light and like see more.

Diana Burbano: Yeah. You know, that's so interesting too, because I feel like sometimes, um, and just that one layer that people see is is, is something that's already perceived, especially when you're not of the majority. Like you don't have the, you don't get the, the grace of having faults or, uh, difficulties or differences. You don't get that grace, you get, you know, you have to either be perfect or you have to be this stereotype thing. Right? Yup. Yup.

L. Trey Wilson: And, and, and just very little deviation of variety within the group, very sick one dimensional in terms of what it is to be Latin X, what is to be African-American. And I think for those of us that may fall out of those particular tropes of what they are supposed to be, then there was little work. So what happens is, and what you both did is you created your own, you started creating your own work, they expanded the ideas and definitions of what that is, who that is, what that looked like. And I think that's what we all have. That's what we have to do. You have to begin to expand the perceptions that are out there and know that there's many more colors and layers and aspects of us that may not often get told, are stories about those that aren't often told

Diana Burbano: That's right.

L. Trey Wilson: Exactly. Exactly. These pieces were amazing. Uh, Caliban's island. I mean, the thing that I also, when I was listening to you talk about it, I thought, wow, she's exploring, breaking up these gender identities and other isms then. So that was fast that you were already in that mindset of, of, of not going with the stock way things happen. It doesn't have to end with a love story. There's, there's more dimension. And I love, I even wrote down one of the quotes that I wrote down for you, which was do about there's more in their minds than their hearts. There's more to explore about someone than just the heart about what they love. Can you share a little bit about expand on that a little bit?

Diana Burbano: Oh yeah. Especially now I have a 14 year old. Right. And, and he's going back into school and being with friends again, after being stuck inside for all this time, and yes, there, yes, of course. He's that age where he's, you know, shy and falling in, in like, and love and lost and whatever, but there's also like this real need for connection. That's not, that's just literally about, do we understand the same things? Can I show you this, like Dungeons and dragons thing that I like, well, you understand me with that? Can we make connections that aren't aren't about that? Which I love, because I feel sometimes like we were, so when I was a kid, it was like, you were always sort of stuck, like you were in love with them, or you were, uh, you know, or you were just, I don't know, it's really fun to watch him not have to like pull it, those, um, those norms. Like, they're very, there's a lot of fluidity that I'm seeing from his generation that I love because it feels like it gives them a little room to breathe. Like there's a middle point from being a little kid to being like an adolescent. And there's a really nice little breathing that's happening. That I hope that we can like keep, he can stay in a little bit, you know?

L. Trey Wilson: And one of those things that you talk about for that age range, which was also really fascinating to read, I love to hear both of your opinions about this is what happens to girls in that place, where they get to teens and tweens that those,

those years, in terms of a sudden their body is changing and not in their minds, their minds and bodies are changing and developing and how they get viewed and then how they begin to view themselves, which as you're describing that they, they, they start, they don't, they change from being there, boisterous out loud self, and then seem like they get, um, somehow stifled in some way in that process around that age. Uh, did that happen to you? And what do you see about that? And what's the cause of that. And what's the, what's a way to kind of undermine that or change that?

Diana Burbano: Well, uh, I mean, I thought it was really interesting listening to Pepper's piece because it's literally the same age group, right. That what, that what's happening in the, it, there, it's just a really interesting, uh, moment for girls. And I think w I don't know, I feel like we lose as a protection. We lose a we're, we're not, we're not allowed to be one or the other. It's like, you're either this or that. And like I was saying that middle thing just doesn't exist.

L. Trey Wilson: And it also sound like almost losing a sense of yourself, like a sense of the self that you were almost going to be. And all of a sudden it gets derailed from it. Is it, Pepperell your thoughts about that too?

Peppur Chambers: Absolutely. And I, and this was that I was writing about myself through, through Harlem as well. And, you know, around that time exactly what you said, Diane, I just, I started to feel so ugly and people would, you know, my, my parents' friends would say, you're so pretty. And like, I don't know who you guys are looking at. Like, I just did not feel, I felt so separated from what everyone saw and how I felt on the inside. And I was tomboyish and, and also pits. Once my body started happening, I was embarrassed all the time. So I was covering up and it took like my late twenties to get out of that. You know, like theater helped me get out of that. And I, something does happen. I do think it's related to our bodies, changing of people, seeing us as one way, but mentally we're another, and we haven't caught up and it was such a mess. It feels detrimental because you've, I feel like I, I, I missed on our time where I could have been great sooner and said I was like nervous or something. And, and that's also what I I'm I'm right about in this book. It's like, we have to get through that or pass it, like power through it in a way, and not listen to so much of the outside stuff. And just really keep believing in who we are from that 13, 14, 15 year old, because that kid is awesome. You know, the awesome person in the

Diana Burbano: CCS,

L. Trey Wilson: We have become the questions. Um, we'll boot shop says two of my favorite writers. They're both working in numerous formats, plays, Tys essays, pros, screenplays, do either have a favorite or conversely when they're not interested in, what are the different challenges From those different rounds that you're working in? You have a favorite

Diana Burbano: Just really quickly. One of the things that I'm really enjoying is I'm, I'm, I'm writing like dystopian. Well, I I've been writing dystopian sci-fi with, uh, my friend Damaso Rodriguez. We, we, we did a thing that we really enjoy. And now we're like thinking about doing other kinds of Saifai and it's really, it's something

that makes me so excited. Like how can we do science fiction, but keep it just a little bit more realistic and not quite so idealistic. I mean, I'm a huge star Trek geek, but like, there's, there's other levels of that. And that's something that I'm really excited to explore.

Peppur Chambers: Oh, no, it's fun. I love, I love vintage and I love forties. And so, and so that puts me in my fiction world. And so I've always loved that. And then with, thankfully with pandemic, I started getting to write plays again. I took a big hiatus because again, I was like, I'm tired of this. Nothing seems to be working. So I'm on the, on the fence of which one I love the most screenplays are very hard for me. I love them, but too hard. And then, like you said, Diana, I've been, I've been so stuck in the forties for so long that this past year I did try to write something more science fiction-y and more current even, you know, like today's time. So yeah, I'm trying to explore and, and push myself.

L. Trey Wilson: Nice. Uh, here's the second question. This is from the Simpson, uh, Ms. Chambers, your descriptions were excellent. Did the mother killed herself out of guilt for failing to protect her daughter or to finally protect her daughter?

Peppur Chambers: Oh, that's a good question. And I love it. Uh, I, I see it out of guilt and not being able to take, take, uh, take it anymore. And, um, just, and also it's so many commentaries, but also she, I feel like she gives up on her daughter, which just makes me so personally angry. And so maybe I had to kill her off. Don't tell anyone, but I'm just saying, I think that it was, it was, I've never said that out loud. I think that it was, it's more from her own guilt and, and she couldn't, and she felt helpless, hopeless, but then, but it also opens the door for Harlem. She's got to take care of herself cause there's nobody else here.

Diana Burbano: Right. It's such an amazing inciting incident for right away for the way that the whole thing just rockets forward. I just it's really cool.

L. Trey Wilson: Uh, Daniel, one thing I wanted to really highlight before we discuss time goes so quickly. But when you talked about, um, flattening, once accents, um, that really resonate for me because I've been working with some students here in Los Angeles and what was shocking, disturbing, but yet made a lot of sense is that I saw some of my Latin X students almost shamed of their accent. And I'm like, no, don't keep it talk how you talk. And, but it was so discouraging and it makes that set such since, because so much of Westman happening in our world has been so demeaning and diminishing in terms of that and to realize that they were taking in that in, and then having that be the consequence. Uh, when do you, when you said that in your essay, it really hit me in a very powerful way. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Diana Burbano: Yeah. I really think that we're, it's all trying to shoehorn us into something that we're not right. Like if you have a, if you haven't like an east LA accent, that's just like this and you know, you think, oh, well I couldn't possibly do Shakespeare, but you can, you can do it with that accent. It just has to be a little bigger. Your mouth dropped. I mean, all the things that we learn and I, I bet it's gorgeous and I bet you discover new things and the sounds fall differently. I mean, I just feel like you got to open up those doors for how people sound and let them have

their own voices and let them have accents and listen to that musicality. And don't try to force everybody to be well, w white to have this white sound that doesn't even really exist, you know?

L. Trey Wilson: Yeah. And the concern about that was how it even then taps into someone's perception of self

Diana Burbano: And they, and I've noticed, especially with Latin age students, like they get very quiet and even with the actors is really hard to get them to project because it's, it's so long of like hiding and, and, and, and I'm not thinking that your voice somehow how you speak, how you express yourself. Isn't good enough. It's, it's heartbreaking. Yep.

Peppur Chambers: I was gonna say, and the black side too, because, you know, I grew up in Wisconsin and I never sounded black enough, or so then I, in those rooms I would be, I would close down or when I moved to New York, I sounded too Midwest. So I tried to bend my arms. So I love what you said because it's, it's a good lesson for all of us, just, it's really just about not hiding and like bringing your full self and celebrating, you know, every bit of you.

L. Trey Wilson: And I have to commend you because for both of you, the fact that you're expanding these ideas of who we are and what they look like and what they could possibly be. And in that process honoring who they are, uh, that's so important. And when I was working with students, I was realizing the impact of not having that, but the benefit of when that does get shown and expressed, uh, it's so important. And I think it does something for all of us, regardless of your student or not. We, I mean, we need to see ourselves reflected in ways that honor who we are. So don't feel like we have to somehow somehow diverge from this thing that we present, as you were talking about, uh, um, at the other ism thing that you talked about in, uh, Calvin Allen was also really important terms of fluffy. That that was really, really cool to, uh, to introduce to that age. Can you share a little about that?

Diana Burbano: All of a sudden, I live in downtown long beach, so everything got lateral and, um, yeah, I also feel, I feel like the fairies tend to get, they're like, they're sort of enslaved and there are other all the time and you think, why do we just get to use them for ma that always bugged me as a little kid? Like, why aren't we just, we just get to use them and then like, that's it. And, and they don't have any say in how they feel. I always got mad about stuff like that.

L. Trey Wilson: And one of your other quotes you mentioned, I just want to tap into as well. Um, T taking the joy out of magic. I thought that was really powerful as well. Like somehow we diminish the magic and the qualities that possess and somehow make that something that's, we don't connect to it or maybe less real. But I think that, uh, recognizing that there is joy there there's joy and magic and not to take it out of, not take the T not to separate the two from each other. And so if a magic is described as something heinous or evil or bad or something, that's not something that's positive for people to express and to feel,

Diana Burbano: I mean, and for, for magic, you can read silliness or, you know, goofiness, um, just your own bizarre sense of humor. However, you know, don't take away people's joys. I was really, I think what I would have to say that play is about, it's like, let people live in their joy and if it's a little, you think it's a little weird it's okay. It's okay. It's, you know, it's, there's

L. Trey Wilson: You were saying in terms of, especially that quote, wanting to expand and raise black women into areas of conversation that we're not often seen or talked about, or even presented in performances. Can you elaborate a little bit on that, on what those areas might be? Do you want to even venture to see more us, more people represented in those discussions?

Peppur Chambers: Yeah, it was, um, the two mains are definitely what we said though. The hero, um, what was the bumpy? Who was the 1940s, um, bumpy and, um, it'll come to me. So again, like seeing women being, um, being villains and being bad, black women being good, bad villains. I like, I want to see more of that. And then, um, the, oh, and then the other thing was, um, sex trafficking, human trafficking, not a good topic, but, um, when do we ever talk about it? Like when do we w you know, I'm, I'm born in 70, so the, what happened in, um, was it in the eighties or the nineties and Georgia with those kids that were, I don't know if you guys know, remember that, but that stuck in my head of like, well, who's taking care of the black children, like when people disappear and even in the forties, like no one would write about it and all these people, they just disappear.

Peppur Chambers: And so I just wanted to talk about that. I wanted to say that this has been happening for a long time. We need to take care of our children. We need to watch out for them and we need to, and also about community. And in that sense too, like looking out for one another. But, um, and then the real life thing, I did write this in 20 12, 20 13, or when it came out anyway. So, um, even with lower deaths working with, with them in the sex trafficking and human trafficking play with safe Harbor, I just, um, it's the topic that's important to me because I feel like we don't talk about it enough. Um, and so it's very lightly in the book, but it was important to me to, to write about it.

L. Trey Wilson: Oh, definitely. So what's next before I let you both go, anything that you're working on, presently that you'd like to share with us or anything that we can look forward to seeing? Uh, what, how about you, Diana? We'll start with you. What are you doing now?

Diana Burbano: I just came back from Livermore where I wrote a play for them about, about vaccines and COVID, I super quick wrote something. And so that's going to get shown in November and I was really terrified, but I think it's okay. I think they liked it. So even though it's very eggheady, I hope I got it right. Luckily I got the interview, but to scientists. So here's hoping that it's, it's more or less accurate.

Peppur Chambers: And, um, I don't know, I'm working on the second book and for all your writers out there is taking me almost seven years to write part two of this book. So I want to be very transparent things, take a long time. So I am definitely working on that. I'm working on, um, a nice commission authority that's that we're

doing. Um, and I'm, we're highlighting prisons and, um, Diane, I want to give on high, the Gary Marshall, right? The new works. Oh

Diana Burbano: Yeah. Oh, thank you.

Peppur Chambers: I saw your name on the list. I was so happy to like, um, and the other thing is anti-ice theaters have code plays. I'm working on that too. Yeah. So those are the things I'm so thankful that like, I know

L. Trey Wilson: COVID was crazy for us, but like, it just brought out so much creativity for me personally, I think for a lot of apps and there's a lot of juices flowing in my world right now. So I'm happy. Uh, I'm glad to hear that. And one last question I have, I guess, because I'm looking at a time who what's inspiring you now. Uh, we've been, I mean, COVID, and the events of last summer were so challenging and tragic and overwhelming. Um, I like to kind of have us think of something that we're hopeful or, or inspiring during this period of time. What anything particular stand out for you as something that really, uh, helped you maneuver through this, but also just made you happy or excited or, or whatever, anything in particular then?

Diana Burbano: Well, uh, I have, um, I have a little theater company in Santa Ana where it's all Latin women called breath of fire. And we, um, we're just really with each other and we'll, and, and my artistic director wrote, uh, Sarah Guerrera her first play or not her first play, but her first full length play. And it is so good. And I can't wait to like help her push it out into the world, you know, cause she's helped me so much. And it's awesome to have, um, be able to maybe like help her out to okay,

Peppur Chambers: Cool. And I was, I was giggling because I was saying racism and white supremacy. Like those things are really inspiring me right now. I did write a film about that called do something and I'm going to keep writing about it as much as I can. So I find joy and using my words to tear it all down,

Diana Burbano: Dismantle it all.

Peppur Chambers: That's right.

L. Trey Wilson: You know, that's one of the things that's been fascinating. That's one of the things that's actually been kind of like a surprising offshoot of these events, like an up to awareness around things. I mean, I can speak for myself as one of the things that really was off the radar for me, but became on the radar, was looking at these monuments. I never paid attention to monuments or the statues of arcs. I didn't, it didn't have me think about why they were there, who they were. And now I can't walk by one without like saying, who is this person? Why is it where's that stature for them? And that's a really, I think, important thing to begin to not take these things that we're celebrating for granted and really asking, should this be celebrating? Should this be something we continue to celebrate? So I'm glad to have that on my radar now. And even like even schools, names, having schools names and, and marginalized communities, neighborhood, whereas like that person should not be on the building of

marginalized communities. And those things I think are things that have increased I've Myra. Were They like that for the two of you?

Diana Burbano: Well, actually I have a play called beheading Columbus. That's based on that whole, uh, um, when they knocked down the Columbus statue in golden gate park.

L. Trey Wilson: Oh, nice. How about, how about you pepper? Anything that was like a new innovation or awareness around?

Peppur Chambers: Um, this is a good question. I just, some of it is it's more personal in terms of people like I'm trying to, I still have a lot of fear of people, you know, I'm just always worried that they're going to do something. So I'm just trying to have a, uh, uh, more like a stronger, more positive outlook of people in crowds and things like that. It's a weird answer, but I'm just trying to get past like going down and like see the, see the like, okay, we're all right. And everyone's here, you know, so it's giving me a little bit more levity and, and mental health area. So I'll take that as a win.

L. Trey Wilson: And we have one more question it's to both of you, it's a, it says to both Ms Burbano and Ms. Chambers, the growth and strength that you showed with your female characters was well done while life's events are often negative, especially for women. Positivity can always prevail in the end. And who's that from? Gina. Thank you for that. Is there anything that you would say to young writer now in terms of giving them some hope or what they should do, or how should, how you craft, how you come with your ideas? What's what has you start at peace? What has you followed through with it and finishing it, uh, any recommendations as the Jetsons or thoughts, some new writers that may not they're about to venture into creating their own work. I'll start with you pepper. Any suggestions? Anything

Peppur Chambers: I will say, I'll say no, idea's stupid. Don't doesn't worry if you don't know structure and what the heck you're doing, do it anyway. Learn, learn, learn, like, be around people, mentor, call people, email people do as much as you can to ask questions and just please do it. Like, just don't stop yourself. Just do it. Like please, please. We need you please.

Diana Burbano: Yeah. Tell your story. No, even if you think your story's been told before, nobody's going to tell it like you, you it's completely unique and just write it even if it's terrible. And it usually is the first draft usually is terrible, but just let that ugly baby be born and then you can put a pretty little bow on it.

L. Trey Wilson: I love That. Thank you. So, so, so, so much for this conversation, you know, with these conversations, like, do you have to go, I want to talk more, but those pieces were so lovely. Um, I wish you all the best and thank you for not only sharing these amazing piece, but what your actions are with these people, our sense of ourselves to others and providing esteem where sometimes there can be lack of that. So thank you for being willing to do that. So I, you're more than welcome. And thank you audience for joining us.

Veralyn Jones:

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