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Avenue Theatre Preview: Behind the Scenes of '*Bliss*'

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[00:00:40] Thank you all for coming to this 5th Avenue Theatre preview presentation at The Seattle Public Library. My name is Bob Tangney, and I am the Music Librarian. I believe that's it. So let me introduce Orlando Morales Director of Education and Engagement at 5th Avenue. [Applause] Thanks, Bob.

[00:00:41] We are so excited to be back for another community conversation here at the Fifth Avenue here at the Seattle Public Library, which is very close to the Fifth Avenue Theatre. If you haven't been to the Fifth Avenue Theatre, I hope that you will join us for *Bliss*. We're just a couple blocks up Fifth Avenue and we're excited again to be here for another community conversation in partnership with the Seattle Public Library. I'd also like to thank a couple of show sponsors that we have for *Bliss*. We have the Edgerton Foundation, Boeing and Bank of America.

[00:01:11] [Applause] Give it up for those sponsors.

[00:01:14] Before we get started, I would like to acknowledge that we are on the traditional land of the first people of Seattle the Duwamish tribe, past and present and honor with gratitude the land itself and the Duwamish tribe. So at the Fifth, we are excited to be working on a brand new musical and presenting it to our audiences across our region. And we're also excited that this Fifth's production of *Bliss* offers an opportunity to re-examine how our lives are affected by stories from childhood fairy tales to narratives about how one should behave and exist in our society. Yet there are also increasing calls to reframe traditional narratives and imagine new possibilities. And even though it is a musical, even though it is going to be so

much fun and filled with some joyful bangers *Bliss*, at its heart, also is an invitation to re-imagine ourselves and re-imagine and see potential for positive change in our world. So again, thank you for joining us tonight. We're also joined by a panel that represents not only our production of *Bliss*, but also our greater community. And I'm looking forward to rich discussion. And again, thank you for being here to join that discussion. So the first panelists I would like to introduce and I'm just going to have them come down and sit down as I introduce them tonight is our esteemed director of our production of *Bliss*, captain of a ship Sheryl Kaller. [Applause] As you come down and I'm going to talk a little bit about you, take that first seat, Sheryl is a Tony Award nominee for work on *Mothers and Sons*, and *Next Fall* on Broadway has worked all across the country. The Roundabout Theatre Company, Lincoln Center Theatre, The New Group, Pasadena Playhouse, Primary Stages, Williamstown Theatre Festival, American Conservatory Theatre.

[00:03:02] There's a whole litany of amazing work that she's done, but most importantly, you're at the Fifth Avenue Theatre for this project. So we are so blessed to have you and so happy that you could join us tonight. [Applause] Also joining us tonight, we have Emma Lively, who is one half of the writing team for *Bliss*, and Tyler Beattie is also here and we're going to have them come up in just a second. I'll talk about them together, though. So together they have co-created many original musicals and even animated movies, including *Blue*, *Candy Land* and *Bunny's Bakery*. Emma is the president of Lively Works Production Company. And is this right? My intern says that you run a custom bakery out of a kitchen in New York City. It's amazing. We love baked goods here. Her stuff is amazing. We'll have to come downstairs and check that out. She's also the co-author of several books. Tyler Beattie, who's going to be up on the piano in just moments is a passionate educator, has taught all over the country, including founding and coaching an award winning middle school debate team in Harlem, NYC. And to kick us off tonight, we're also going to welcome up Kristolyn Lloyd, who is in our production. Starred as Alana Beck in the Broadway and Off-Broadway productions of *Dear Evan Hansen* Off-Broadway credits include *Little Women*, *Paradise Blue*, *Blue Ridge*, *Heathers: The Musical*, and much more. Originated the role of Pumpkin in *Paradise Blue* and in the *Bold and the Beautiful*. All right. Come on now. Has a BFA in drama from Carnegie Mellon University and also was voted best personality in her high school senior class in Houston, Texas.

[00:04:47] We got a great education intern. I got to say that. So probably the internet.

[00:04:53] OK. So we would love to invite Tyler and Kristolyn in to perform "Choices" from our upcoming production, *Bliss*.

[00:05:10] [Singing] It's deep and dark in the forest. I'm all alone.

[00:05:17] Nothing to tether me.

[00:05:20] Nothing at all. I've journeyed far, to a story that's all my own, where I can do anything.

[00:05:35] No dragon too tall.

[00:05:39] With the flutter of the wind there's commotion in my mind and it's clouded with the thoughts of the girls I left behind, beneath the silence I can hear my sisters' voices.

[00:05:59] Do a little for them. Do a little for me. Am I steady like a boulder, or wild like the breeze?

[00:06:04] What's a girl supposed to do with all these choices? I could choose myself.

[00:06:11] Slay a beast 20 times my size. I could do anything. And finally be free.

[00:06:23] Or, I could choose my sisters and fight to protect the four. Defer my dreams just a little more. For the sake of the others. In the shimmer of the light is a glimmer of a doubt, is it me or is it them who I care the most about. And, I've never been alone. And, who knows which direction we all will go?

[00:07:02] Is it me or is it them, is it them or is it me? Am I quiet like the clouds, or as loud as the sea? Because there is a double edge to swords, and choices.

[00:07:04] Maybe a different time, maybe a different place I'd slay a dragon oh, the greatest dragon ever face, I'd be the champion of the world.

[00:07:13] I'd be in first place. But, there are parts of the story you can't erase. Winds change, but my sisters all depend on me to hold the four together. Guilt and blame but the bond is never-ending, and they need me more than ever.

[00:07:35] For now I've learned I must return.

[00:07:36] There was a time when I wished upon a star, for the chance to make a choice and to be the one in charge.

[00:07:43] But now that I'm here, I think I'm drowning in the outside noises. Am I painted like a flower, am I solid like a stone? Am I brave, am I kind, am I messy to the bone.

[00:07:57] What's a girl supposed to do? Power comes with danger. Now I know what I must do.

[00:08:12] With all these choices, alone with choices, for now it's family. But, I still have choices. [End Singing]

[00:08:28] [Applause] Kristolyn Lloyd, Tyler Beattie, Emma Lively. Amazing. Thank you, Tyler. I'm going to ask Emma to come back to.

[00:08:40] Well, let's take a minute to talk a little bit about the show if you all don't mind. So what is *Bliss*? It's a new musical, right? But we'll let the writer talk first.

[00:08:50] All right. Yeah. How about we do that.

[00:08:52] This is a new musical. It's a comedy. It's a fairy tale. And we were very inspired, Tyler and I love fairy tales and love fantasy and pop rock music. And with *Bliss*, we really wanted to shake up some of the assumptions we have in fairy tale culture about what princesses are. What happily ever afters are supposed to look like and just try to mix that up and bring some fun and comedy and rebellion to what is still truly a fairy tale.

[00:09:24] Thank you. So right now in the process, you are ready to open.

[00:09:30] No. So tell us a little bit. So I feel like Kristolyn was glancing at us. You did that beautifully.

[00:09:37] We haven't heard that song like that. When Orlando first scheduled this. That song was a solo and now it's being sung by three people. So thank you for doing that. So that's the reason for the no. We're still writing we are still changing things. Will it? That's the value of being in Seattle and being at a theater like the 5th is the opportunity.

[00:10:01] Musicals are hard and they're hard to get right. And it's kind of the beauty of us being here 'cause we're just gonna stay at it and get the support we need to stay at it. So no, we're not ready to open.

[00:10:16] And Kristolyn you are no stranger to new works process. But is there anything that is unique to this process or something that you have learned or has surprised you about working on this particular project?

[00:10:28] Well, this is the first time I've done a new work with a woman at the helm. Most of the new works that I've I've had produced have had men at the helm of it. So, yeah, it is pretty unique in the sense that, you know, it changes the way that the room is run. It changes the way that notes are given. It changes the way that things are handled when stuff falls behind. And it also adds a layer of. So I don't want it to sound like a pejorative towards men. But there's something about a woman at the helm that adds a sense of sophistication and class to the show. I find, you know, with the directing of it and I don't know if it's the estrogen, but like there's just a there's just a special sheen on it.

[00:11:14] I feel like with with this project. Thank you. I would just want to say thank you. Okay.

[00:11:21] This may be a silly question, but I'll pitch it out there. Why *Bliss*? Why now? We've kind of started to kind of talk about that. But with is there any specific like, oh, yeah, you know, this is a show.

[00:11:33] It's a good thing we're doing the show right now.

[00:11:37] I can start. I think that we're in the midst of the me too movement right now, and I think that what *Bliss* celebrates is individuality is authenticity is. I don't like to talk about myself, but I feel like what Kristolyn was saying, even just having a woman at the helm is the way we as women celebrate our individuality and and how it has been repressed.

[00:12:08] It has been shut down. And this is the beginning of change.

[00:12:15] And what better way to inspire change than through entertainment and through great songs and great choreography and a lot of laughs. And, you know, we built the family from the ground up very inclusively. So our father and four daughters are. It's a very diverse family because families can be made. We have to celebrate the diversity. We have to celebrate joy. We have to celebrate power. And so that's why *Bliss*. Right. Why now? And I also think there's a lot of.

[00:12:53] Messaging around women who, if you say you want to have children or you want to wear a tutu or you like wearing makeup or you want to be feminine.

[00:13:05] That also is frowned upon. So I do think that *Bliss* completely celebrates the.

[00:13:14] You can if you choose to stay home and not work, if you're given the privilege to do that and raise your kids. That's as feminist and as strong as going out to be a fierce, you know, warrior princess like Kristolyn and and her character is. And also, I do think that *Bliss* because it's written by Tyler and Emma.

[00:13:35] It also includes men in feminism and men and fathers in how.

[00:13:43] Nothing about feminism today needs to be against anyone. Everything about feminism today has to be for

[00:13:51] It has to be positive. A yes and a yes and. So that's for me on why *Bliss* now.

[00:13:57] As you've probably already guessed, we've already started talking, *Bliss* does incorporate but also simultaneously challenges fairytale culture. Or does it anything that you've

learned throughout this process or realized or come to just see in the fairytale culture that you had not, you know, kind of scrutinized before it? Maybe you got into this process saying you we're going to make a statement about this, but was there anything surprising that you uncovered about the the princess culture, the fairytale culture?

[00:14:27] Well, we definitely one of the core ideas in the show revolves around perfectionism and assumptions about princesses. And that was when the first ideas Tyler and I came up with it is the core metaphor of the show. The idea that there is a magical spell that all perfect princesses are under, which makes them all talk the same, walk the same, think a certain way, not have strong opinions, look pretty, you know, and there's a lot of, you know, systemic princess stuff [laughter] that we are playing around with in the core metaphor of the show. And so that's yeah, it's definitely like a central idea.

[00:15:07] And one of the first ideas we had and wanted to comment on in creating this, I would love Kristolyn and to speak to that question too, because I think one of my biggest learning curves in this is I never realized the lack of role models and princesses for women of color.

[00:15:31] And so, you know, I would love for you to speak to that a little bit. Sure.

[00:15:35] I mean, one of the most powerful things is seeing my niece, who's 9, and she has all these images and icons who are black. She has black Barbies.

[00:15:51] I didn't have black Barbies till I started getting older and they became more like a thing. And it really brings me to tears sometimes when I think about the fact that that generation like my niece doesn't know a world where a black president isn't possible. So diving into these fairytales, one of the things that I found most inspiring about *Bliss* is that it's about girls encouraging other girls, whereas a lot of fairy tales tend to have like girl on girl hate, like Cinderella, the evil step sisters with evil stepmothers. Like it's just like women not being kind to each other.

[00:16:24] And it's it's a false narrative that is toxic and destructive.

[00:16:30] And as much as I enjoy the nostalgia of fairytales, there's something very kind of.

[00:16:38] We tend to destroy the nostalgia.

[00:16:41] When when you see these women on stage, there's this number where, you know, I don't want to give anything away.

[00:16:47] But like the women end up showing each other how to love themselves and the bodies that they're born in. And, you know, the power that they possess and their femininity or their their masculinity. So that's the thing that I discovered that I was very surprised by, is the lack of female camaraderie within fairytales.

[00:17:08] Yeah. Thank you.

[00:17:10] Ok. So we're going to round out our panel a little bit here. Well, I'm just going to say thank you again for your work. And I'm so looking forward to seeing the show as I propose earlier. Our community conversation tonight extends beyond *Bliss*. And as a theater educator, I'm constantly aware of how much our lives are being affected by the narratives we tell and the stories that we are exposed to. So with *Bliss* as our context for tonight. I'm looking forward to a discussion that focuses on how our stories have been shaped and how we are shaping our understanding of gender and how we can empower young women and dismantle barriers faced by female identifying people in our community. And so to complete our panel, I'm going to introduce three more amazing people who will be joining us. And I'll have you all come down as I introduce you. First is Jennifer Williams, who's. Yes. [Applause]

[00:18:01] Give it up for Jennifer Williams. Thank you for being here.

[00:18:04] Is a Consumer Banking and Investments Operational Excellence Executive responsible for evaluating all business processes and sales operations at Bank of America. Community involvement is one of Jennifer's core values, and she currently serves on the board of the Northwest Area Foundation and is active in the Stanford Alumni Association.

[00:18:25] She's a member of the Black Executive Leadership Council, as well as an executive sponsor of the Seattle chapter of the Black Professional Group and co-chair of California Women Leaders Group at Bank of America.

[00:18:37] Jennifer, thank you for being here.

[00:18:41] I would also like to invite up Alice Stark for us. Alice is lead therapist at You Grow Girl, which is a nonprofit organization serving female identifying youth and families throughout Washington State since its founding in 2002. You Grow Girl has evolved and is rooted in the deep belief that girls from chronically under resourced populations, especially girls of color, must be accepted for their authentic selves and supported by the community of true allies that amplifies gender, economic and racial justice. You Grow Girl empowers youth to become leaders, to promote economic equality and opportunity for not only themselves, but other sisters throughout Washington State and beyond. And I will say about how specifically Alice, as a training and development coach as well, and has done research on storytelling and mental health, specifically with military veterans. Thank you so much for being here, Alice. And finally, we have Chantey Andrews. Come on down.

[00:19:47] She got a crew tonight.

[00:19:49] Chantey is diversity education and training manager at Girl Scouts of Western Washington. And you've advocated for challenging bullying policies in our kind of educational systems around this area? Well, the Girl Scouts mission, if you didn't know, is to build Girl Scouts of courage, confidence and character who make the world a better place. Girl Scouts, they unleash their inner girl DRL. So go getters, innovators, risk takers, leaders.

[00:20:17] Can we just thank all of our panelist here tonight?

[00:20:24] So to kick things off, I want to ask in your life, have you ever had an experience when a story has blocked your path, either professional or personal or a path to self-realization?

[00:20:36] Definitely. I think, you know, as we were preparing for tonight and thinking about stories, there are the stories that people tell for us. And I was also reflecting on the stories we tell ourselves. And so with that question having a blockage, I can definitely think of instances professionally where there was a perception that because of my background or because of my race or because of the fact that I'm a mother and a professional, that there were certain things I would and wouldn't do. There have been some black, you know, some points that have attempted to block me. But I think, you know, also sometimes the stories we tell ourselves and getting out of. In my case, getting out of our head and having the courage to say just because I haven't done X doesn't mean that I can't do it is what really comes to mind.

[00:21:26] And I've been in finance for 20 years and have done I've been grateful to do just a number of different things for the bank. And I think sometimes you get on a track where they say, well, you're the investment person or you're the sales leader. And having the courage to show that you can do other things and that you're a lifelong learner helps to kind of work through those things, because otherwise people will chart your path for you. And I love the lyrics to the change song that you are "Choices" song that you were singing, because I often say that's what life is all about. It's about choices. Like each day you get to wake up and say, like, who do I want to be today? Do I want to do the same things I did yesterday? And if there are things I want to change, we have that choice. And really, if we just set our minds to it, we can make those those different choices to live differently.

[00:22:17] So have people tried to block me? Absolutely. Have I gotten in my head sometimes and been my own worst enemy? Sure. But, you know, I am excited about the future and live my life knowing that I have I have choices.

[00:22:32] That was very well said. Thank you to quote E-40. Everybody's got choices.

[00:22:37] I think as women, we've all been in situations where we have been blocked or blocked ourselves. And I think an interesting conversation I had recently when somebody asked me, what's your history? Tell me about you. And the story that I told was immensely different than the story I would have told 10 years ago. And those changes in our story, I think, are just as impactful, recognizing changes in our story as being able to recognize that we are making those changes and tell those changes and let those changes kind of guide us is really important in the way that we are growing, learning, developing. As women, I think we oftentimes are told what we are supposed to think and how we are supposed to think. And I just want to start by saying I'm so grateful to be on this panel with all of you wonderful women. Thank you for not blocking me.

[00:23:31] I'd like to add that while I do agree that we also have to make a conscious choice about, you know, how we choose to act on how we see ourselves.

[00:23:41] But there is a huge elephant in society where this story has already been told about me in particular as as a black woman. The narrative has been so dominant that my time is spent really trying to challenge and dismantle it. So there's very little room for my choice per say, because I'm constantly trying to shift your mind or change your mind about how you see

me and prove to you that I'm not the person that you saw in the media or that you read about last week.

[00:24:14] And so while there is choice, there is very little space made available for that choice to be activated, because we have society creating a story for us and have told it for centuries.

[00:24:27] Yeah, that's really interesting. That term that we hear all the time now, intersectionality, everybody seems to be using that term for their, you know, upcoming party, but was coined to talk about that that burden that that some people are are faced with in our societies. I'm glad you brought that up. And it did make me want to ask if people want to speak to a moment in their life when they're like, oh, you know what, I'm going to change the way that I talk about myself. I love what you're saying about changing your own personal story. But was there a part in your coming into who you are now, that moment when you're like, you know what, I'm gonna stop saying this about when people ask me about me or this to myself and you kind of change that narrative about yourself or where you came from, do you have a moment like that?

[00:25:14] I can just speak. Being an artist and being in the theater that we use our work to do that. I mean, I'm told all the time I can't do things. And so I kind of find the best way is to just do them when I'm, you know, and also being given that opportunity to. Do you change the way you talk about yourself? I would say it's probably more in behavior. I would have to say that not a lot of people ask.

[00:25:45] So I would say for me it's about behavior. It's about, you know, I know we're here in Seattle. It's about doing a play like *Bliss*, you know, I am going to be 60 next year. There's a lot of young people up on that stage. There's a lot of young women up on the stage. They're singing, they're dancing, they're celebrating. They're singing songs like Kristolyn sang. And they're also singing about confidence and about self-esteem and about authenticity. And so for me, that's the way I change the way I speak about myself. I always say that if I have two daughters. So I totally relate to people. Just assuming because you're a mother, because you're in a predominantly male field, you are limited. You know, one is limited. So my whole litmus for everything I do is if my kids will be proud of me. And that leads me in the right direction.

[00:26:39] As an actress and just as a woman of color in this specific industry that I am in. I started reading Brené Brown.

[00:26:47] Does anyone know who Brené Brown is? Yeah, she's. I put it off for the longest time because I was like, I'm not gonna let her help me heal myself.

[00:26:55] I don't need a white woman to heal myself. Is how I felt. And I finally picked up the book and she's from my high school and I was like, I was whispered it.

[00:27:06] And I didn't say it too loud. But that's how I felt, so I started reading her book.

[00:27:09] And I think, you know, the thing that has been most prevalent for me in changing the narrative about myself is getting away from shame. And the only way that I'm really going to not allow people to put me into that place is by being the nicest person to myself I could possibly be. So recently it's been a change in a narrative for me. And going, yes, I'm black, you know? No. None of my family is in the entertainment industry. I'm a complete trailblazer. And the idea that I could get even to like the school that I went to or the fact that I could, you know, book a show like *Dear Evan Hansen*, a year into being in New York City at 30 years old, like I started a whole new life.

[00:27:58] And so recently and just like I guess just like hitting my 30s, I was like, no, I have to be the biggest fan of myself. I can't live another 30 years thinking that I'm not capable or worthy. I can't speak on like how it's affecting my life now. But I can say that it is something I actively choose to do every day and in conversations with the women in our cast. It's like, I'm not gonna like join in on like bashing my body. I'm going to only speak good things about my body and your body like we're beautiful. And there's so many diverse sizes and colors in our cast. I was like, this is the perfect show to start practicing self-love. So it came at the right time.

[00:28:40] Well, first off, I've just got to take my nieces are going to kill me if I don't take a selfie with you.

[00:28:45] At the end of this, because they live in New York City and they loved *Dear Evan Hansen*.

[00:28:50] But I think that piece around kind of how we you know, what we would stop. I mean, there was a period of time where I you know, I've been in Seattle for almost four years and I moved here after a very painful divorce. And I used to start my story with almost an apology for being here. Like I moved here to create this great life for me and my daughter. And it was, you know, it was me. I think growing up where I did where a lot of my friends were, had children

very young and had different career paths and didn't have the educational, the benefit of the education I received. I was kind of I was almost apologetic for being a professional mom and being divorced and, you know, being really afraid to say I was a single mom because people would put me into a box. And there came a point where and I remember the day like it was yesterday where I was like, first off, I've got to stop saying I'm new here and because Seattle is home for us and we're building a phenomenal life we so blessed to be here. But secondly, I don't have to apologize for anything. Like I am.

[00:29:54] I am here living in my daughter and I. We are living our best life. And I don't I don't owe an explanation to anyone.

[00:30:02] And I think that shift and really being in an environment where there are just really wonderful people around us, thankfully, like have really supported that change for me. And it was just stopping the apology.

[00:30:16] Sheryl Sandberg, I know I spoke already but Sheryl Sandberg, who's a little controversial right now, in her book *Lean In*. She has a couple of exercises as women. And one is to not say I'm sorry. And the other is to not qualify with the word just so like if a man would write an email, he would say, I'm checking in. But a woman writes, I'm just checking in and we're constantly qualifying our demands or our asks.

[00:30:48] And when I read that, I was like, oh, my God. I say, I'm sorry. And just all the time. So it's almost, you know, Orlando, like, you have to believe it. And then you also have to, as you asked before, change your language too because words mean a lot.

[00:31:06] You believe and achieve it.

[00:31:08] I think a really big part of for me, being able to change my narrative with myself was being able to trust and accept that narrative. When I used to tell my life story, I would start with a lot of the hardships that I experienced, and I did that as a means to justify why I was here. You should trust me because I've gone through this. I've experienced this. It was a way for me to to ground myself or to connect with people. And as my narrative has changed, my story didn't. I still went through the same experiences, but I no longer have to use those experiences to justify my worth anymore. Whether those experiences were good or bad, and that was really hard, mainly because it was scary, because the story I knew before, I knew. I knew exactly what to expect. I knew how people would respond when I started to change that narrative. People responded differently because I was saying something different. Right. And in my mind,

I thought they were responding to me as a person when really they were responding to the words I was saying. And so being able to trust that my words have a power and being able to trust that I have control over the narrative that I'm sharing was a really important facet of being able to just change the way I talked about and to myself.

[00:32:22] Thank you. I wanted to give each of our community leaders a chance to talk a little bit about how your work is specifically working to change a narrative or change something that you feel like is affecting young people or female identifying people in our community. So I wonder if you could start with Jennifer.

[00:32:42] Absolutely. So there are a couple of things that come to mind. First, I think so I'll start internally and then I'll talk just in the broader community. So at Bank of America, we have a program that we call Courageous Conversations. And it really is structured to get people to talk. And as much as we're talking here about stories, I think sometimes it's important to remember to take the time to learn the stories of the people that you're close to. I think about Bryan Stevenson's work where he talks about proximity.

[00:33:17] Like it's really hard to judge a person or to hate a person if you have proximity to them, like really understanding who they are and knowing their story. And the framework we use at Bank of America is called Courageous Conversations. And across the country we have large group sessions and small group sessions where we've talked about everything from, you know, racial issues happening in our country to domestic violence to different health issues. And we do so in a way that is really intended to bring people closer and to talk about the things that are taboo or perceived to be taboo, but that really create those barriers that without a good dialogue, we can't move forward as teammates and as a country.

[00:34:07] And then externally, we have a lot of work that we do in the community through our community volunteer program, where we go out and support organizations in each of the communities where Bank of America has representation here in Seattle. We're very proud of some relationships, the Fifth being one that we have where we have an opportunity to help get kids into the theater and just to let them see and hear beautiful works of art like *Bliss* and really, you know, see how it makes them feel and internalize it. And so through the volunteer work that I do and that our teammates do here locally, you think about that being multiplied and all of the different places we are across America. And I'm really proud of the impact that we're able to have both in people hours as well as in financial dollars and the communities where we live and work.

[00:35:04] Thank you for that work. That is amazing.

[00:35:08] You Grow Girl is a nonprofit organization in the community. We provide at risk services to youth in our community, particularly female identifying youth, but also allies of women in our community. And we do that in a lot of different ways and on a lot of different levels as well. So we have our very straightforward services where we get to provide mental health services, counseling services, mentoring services, also like job readiness. So we help kids go check out colleges, practice how to do interviews. We help them pick out clothes for interviews, teach them how to write their resume, just basic life, things that we don't necessarily get a lot of support, particularly as young women. But I think one of the really fascinating and cool things that I love about You Grow Girl, is that it doesn't just stop at the participants we serve. One of the unique parts about my role is that I get to provide a lot of supervision and development to our clinicians. And so it's almost as catalytic experience where we are empowering the sisters that we work with to empower the sisters and our community, to empower the sisters that they then interact with every day. And so our goal is to really create this cataclysmic change where women feel empowered and they feel like they have equal rights and opportunity in our community. And I think a big part of that is with figuring out what are the stories that we're being told oftentimes that are keeping us where we're at. We have a youth advisory board that goes to Washington, D.C. every year, and they advocate for different policies and they know lawmakers in the community. And at this point, I would actually go to them for networking if I needed to get something done in this state, because they are some of the most empowered young women. And they teach us, the staff members, how to maintain that empowerment and how to just keep pride in ourselves and be who we are.

[00:37:00] I love that idea of cataclysmic change – is that what you just said? Oh, you know, theater people, we love action, we love conflict. It just sounds like the way that change should happen. At Girl Scouts of Western Washington.

[00:37:13] We're almost always immediately associated with cookies. And I would say yes, and we we are.

[00:37:20] But what we're what we're trying to really do is we have a responsibility to equip all of our members from our troops to our board with diversity, equity and inclusion lens. And so one of my responsibilities in our organization is how much information can I provide? Can I train? Can I educate to help you recognize that one - there is a lens. Two, you can choose to put it on and be able to accept what you see when you have it on there. And what's happening is when we say for every girl at Girl Scouts of Western Washington, it means that we're no longer just boxing a Girl Scout into sewing and camping. We're more than that. There's more beneath the surface of every girl than what the dominant narrative of a cookie seller is. So we're really being intentional about our community is diverse. There's nothing we can change

about that. But how can we be more responsive and more culturally sensitive and competent to what's happening around us and that we're part of. So we spend our time educating our community, for one, on being comfortable with being uncomfortable, because it is a very difficult conversation to sit down with anyone at any stage or age or development and talk to them about race and racism and injustice and social inequities. And so we're trying to prepare our community to understand the space that we're taking up. We do land acknowledgments as well, because you go to a Girl Scout camp and you completely disregard that that space is occupied by original inhabitants and should be returned back to those individuals. So we're trying to we're doing a lot of work and we're attacking, attacking it at every angle. But we're creating a space where you can be supported through that discomfort. And I believe is echoing out and our values in the community as well.

[00:39:15] Thank you. And thanks from everybody's work that they're doing in the community.

[00:39:20] So I love this quote. It's oh, Audre Lorde. She wrote that "sometimes we drug ourselves with the dreams of new ideas. The head will save us. The brain alone will set us free. But there are no new ideas still waiting in the wings to save us as women, as human. There are only old and forgotten ones, new combinations, extrapolations and recognitions from within ourselves, along with the renewed courage to try them out." And it's kind of that that little troublemaker kid in me that does like what we're talking about, new stories. Let's talk about this this amazing quote from Audre Lorde, when she says, actually, there are no new stories. So I want to toss it to you for your thoughts.

[00:40:00] But I think more specifically about are there old quote unquote, stories or narratives that you actually celebrate that actually empower you, that you actually want to, you know, let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater. But there are things that we need to hold primordially that will carry us through.

[00:40:19] I'm going to kind of twist that a little bit and riff off of what these three brilliant ladies said and what Tyler and Emma have done with a new story that's inspired by a lot of old stories. And I think what we've been spending most of our night talking about is how society writes the story for us.

[00:40:42] And what Tyler and Emma have done is given us four young women who are locked in a tower, which is an old story, and their father, because they have a dead mother, as in all fairytales, and their father has taught them to be authentic and has taught them to be themselves. And the only way that he felt in light of society that he can do that is by not letting them out.

[00:41:16] And so I think that.

[00:41:19] And then, of course, I'm not giving too much away, but they eventually get out because what else would we talk about for two hours and 20 minutes, although I don't really know how long the play runs truly, and how these women who were brought up to tell their own stories influence other mostly women and some men that they encounter in the forest.

[00:41:49] And so I would say that what Tyler and Emma have and then we have, you know, brilliant, fierce woman like Kristolyn in playing our oldest sister, who remembers what it was like to have a mom and remembers what it was like to be out in the world.

[00:42:08] And so she's trying to help her sisters. Like, I kind of feel like that's my role in life now, getting to be like I'm listening to what I got kicked out of being a Girl Scout leader. They wouldn't let me. I only did one year because they thought I was a little too risqué with the troop. I talk to you about it later.

[00:42:26] But then, you know, which makes sense. But anyway. But I'm thinking that it's my job as a woman, my age, as a mother, as someone who was brought up in this world to only be one thing really.

[00:42:41] And how I can pass along, how I treasure what my mother taught me about being a mother and how I. Which is an old story. And yet how it's my responsibility as an artist and as a woman and as a parent to tell this new story that Tyler and Emma wrote. And I do want to really say that it has a lot of fun. We're talking about a lot of serious things now because we as women have to deal with a lot of serious things and a lot of as you said, you know, there's so much discomfort around talking about these things and empowering young women. And I feel like, you know, Tyler and Emma have done it, and as Mary Poppins would say, with a spoonful of sugar as well. And it really helps that medicine go down.

[00:43:27] Sometimes I sort of answered your question.

[00:43:32] I have a thought.

[00:43:33] When you're talking about old narratives and throwing baby out with the bathwater, I think a lot about women's roles in society because I grew up very southern. And so there's this natural draw towards traditional gender roles within a household. And that's something that I've really been challenging myself with because I don't know if I'm gonna be a mom. I want to be. But when I think about, you know, fairytales and the roles that like older women play in the fairytales is like fairy godmothers or stepmothers who are evil or good. There doesn't seem to be a spectrum that women get to exist on within like the inside of that, you know. And so one of the things I keep coming back to is just the idea of community with women surrounding each other. And it's it's it's something that when I think about, you know, we're talking about Girl Scouts. I was in the Girl Scouts and we went on camping trips. My dad and I were like the only black people on the trip. We were always like, it still feels kind of weird, just like it's just a little uncomfortable to be called Indian princesses and chiefs. And being in Girl Scouts it is just like, you know, as I got older, I was like, that's weird. We shouldn't do that anymore.

[00:44:47] And he was like, great, I don't want to either, but he never wanted to. But there's something so powerful about that culture.

[00:44:56] When you think of Native Americans, when you think of tribes, when you think of I in any part of the country, whatever color skin, women serve a very specific purpose within that tribe working together and growing up, the generation, you know, that's coming. And I think one of the things that I would like to see incorporated more in our culture is men and their involvement in the home in raising children. I have a brother who's married, his wife and him they have just curated such a partnership that is equal. And the way his sons love on him and are affectionate with him, it's because he has taken the time to not just be like I'm the paternal dad who walks around with this grunt and this, you know, constant annoyance. You know, it's it's not just this general wash of who what role he's supposed to play in the home. It's it's like a together partnership thing. And we have that happen in the show at one point where, you know, a prince is like, I think I'm not going to be prince. I think I'm going to let you rule. Like, it's kind of cool to think about how it's a genesis that we can't really abandon as far as the roles that women play in society. But it is something that we can evolve and add men into the frame on a deeper, more empathetic and sympathetic level. I think.

[00:46:16] I think it's it's really interesting, too, when we talk about new stories and old stories, because it doesn't matter how many old stories there are if we don't have exposure to them. And so that's one of the things that makes plays like this and panels like this and just opportunities like this so impactful is that regardless of how many stories they are, there are we are hopefully reaching somebody who hasn't heard this story and who might feel a little bit more empowered simply because now they're hearing it because this story is new to them. Whether it's an old story or a new story is less important than is this new to this person and

how can this person take that and move forward? Thank you guys again for making this play. I can't wait to see it.

[00:47:01] Thank you for bringing it up, because it reminds me that when we're talking about inclusivity, especially here in the United States, and if I think about like even fairytales in my culture, you know, there's a person of color if you dig back and I didn't know this until I was college, like in my cultural heritage. It's a matriarchal society and fairytales reflected that, too. But that narrative is not out in princess culture, so that the possibility out that there are princess stories that are empowering all over the world and got some of, you know, that have come to the surface. But there are so many other stories that could be out in the open that we can help find and bring out there.

[00:47:39] I wanted to add to that too. That there is a component of underrepresentation is not that there aren't any stories that include, like you were saying, like a black father in playing these roles. They are definitely there. What happens is that there's a underrepresentation that creates this belief that there the story does not exist at all. And so if we're going to be looking at how often or not the stories told or who has access to it, we have to consider, like, who is the storyteller? Are they representing the group that is not being represented or not? And so I think it would be interesting. I'm imagining how this story is unfolding now. I'm looking at the characters and you say that they all share the same father – so, I'm like Hmm. So is the father black? So I'm thinking about what is the representation of the entire cast and how these stories are being represented. And are we aware of are we perpetuating other narratives by still leaving out representation from other groups? And so is a collective responsibility to ensure that, yes, this story is there. How can we elevate it until it more often than we're telling these other stories?

[00:48:52] Thank you. And I would just say, just as a theater person, like, I really am grateful for that possibility in the theater world to kind of create that universe that you want to imagine that the kinds of places that we want to see. I have one final question. That's a little bit more in the spirit of *Bliss*, in terms of a televity, as you said, these are important issues that we talk about and they do kind of run throughout *Bliss* in a really meaningful way, even though it is a very fun and lighthearted show. But what are the examples of joy that give you hope for the future? Like what? What are things that you see around us now that give you that you're like, you know what we can do that empower you, I guess. So things that bring you joy and it kind of get you going and give you that that kind of hopeful view of the horizon.

[00:49:44] I'm going to say something a little fun and trite, but I went Kristolyn and invited me to a party at her apartment and I was watching Beyoncé on her television from Coachella. Oh, man, that gave me a lot of hope.

[00:50:01] And she and her dancers and the people, as you were saying, who's represented up there, all shapes and sizes and celebrating life and music and everything.

[00:50:18] So I'm going to say Beyoncé. I just it just really quick.

[00:50:23] One of our students said after we had a long discussion about that performance and she said, this needs to win a Tony. So that's what good theater for her that year.

[00:50:32] I like to add what's bringing me joy from our organization's perspective is that, you know, is very aspirational, that we do this work, but it takes time. And in that process, we do have opportunities for girls who may not yet see themselves as a Girl Scout or see themselves in Girl Scout. They have the opportunity to be a member. We call them Juliettes and they can create their own path. My daughter, she had a similar experience. She is a Girl Scout. She tried a couple of troops. She didn't see herself. She didn't feel like she fit in. She communicated that to Girl Scouts. And now she has the opportunity to create and design her own path until or when you see yourself or a place for you at the table. So I think we're trying to just be realistic that this is the journey that we're all on. But more over, I believe that my joy comes from seeing more people giving themselves permission to exist and claim their space. And however it comes out, whether it's in music or activism, more folks are just being more courageous and taking up this space.

[00:51:42] So that brings me joy.

[00:51:45] I feel like I could tell a million stories right now about all of the kids that bring me joy that I get to work with every day and my co-workers and our board of directors. Oh, my gosh. They're also cool. But I'm going to just do one little one.

[00:51:56] I was conducting an assessment last week with a young woman and I asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up. And she looked at me and she gave a really big sigh. And she goes, I just want to be alive. And I just thought that was the coolest answer that she just wanted to be alive and explore and just get to decide what she wanted to do every single day and not have to commit to one thing. And that was just the coolest, coolest thing. Coolest response I ever could have gotten to that.

[00:52:27] That gives me a lot of joy.

[00:52:29] It's a tough one because there's so many things that bring me joy. I think the biggest one is just what I can be in the present. So like just having the awareness and appreciation for the time we have at this moment gives me a lot of joy, both from kind of absorbing what's around me and really honoring the time and just how precious these interactions are. Initially, I was going to say the future brings me joy, but it's really it's the present that brings me the greatest amount of joy and allowing myself to experience the sights, the smells, the experience of everything around me is really when I get the greatest joy.

[00:53:14] I get a lot of joy from it's going to sound cliché, but I get a lot of joy from my job because I've gotten to be in rooms with originating stuff and creating new works.

[00:53:25] It gives me the opportunity to create a space for women of color.

[00:53:28] And, you know, I went in for a job like a couple weeks ago and I didn't get it.

[00:53:35] But I found out that the girl who did book it was a girl who whose first role was Alana in *Dear Evan Hansen*. And I was like, oh, my gosh, how incredible that whatever work I did that many years ago created a space for her. And now here she is like booking. It was it was just so bittersweet and wonderful. To, to know that she got a platform and she got to be seen because of work that, you know, I put in on something and I feel that way about anytime someone calls me into work on a piece, that's always the first thing I think is they may not keep me, but I'm going to make this a really good role for a woman of color.

[00:54:19] And whoever steps into this after me is going to get is going to be fulfilled by hopefully the the work they put in on it. So that brings me a lot of joy.

[00:54:30] That's great, Kristolyn. I think artists. You're so right. Get so much joy from doing their work. And I think the creative process is happening right now inside the 5th is incredible. There are so many people with so much creativity and passion and skill and beauty is being created in there.

[00:54:49] Wait'll you see Pincus Glimmermore's jacket that will bring you joy.

[00:54:56] There's a lot of power in the creation of something from nothing. And I think I hope that exposure to *Bliss* will, will give people a fun evening. And, I think it will.

[00:55:08] Well, thank you.

[00:55:10] We have some time for a few questions if anybody has questions out in the audience.

[00:55:16] Oh.

[00:55:17] Yeah.

[00:55:17] I'm just going to paraphrase really quick, so advice for young women who are trying to change the world around them and kind of getting bombarded or not getting the information that they need.

[00:55:29] I think there's always a leap into the dark. I think it's always kind of a guess. And I think that there's I believe that we all have some small step we can take. And for me, I was a classical violist who was bored and wanted to create art and not recreate art. And I was trained by a bunch of conservatory musicians who, I mean, seemed totally crazy. And I think that there's always just something small we can do. And if we're willing to take a small step, it's still a step. It's a small step is so big, I think. Don't underestimate this small step because it is movement it is going the right direction.

[00:56:09] My dad always says if God can trust you with little, he can trust you with much. And.

[00:56:17] At one point in my career, I quit acting because I just was like, not fulfilled by it and I didn't know what that meant, but I knew that I for some reason was like, I'm going to be a missionary in Southeast Asia. So for a year I was a missionary in Southeast Asia. It made no sense. My mom was like, if you do this, I'm not supporting you.

[00:56:35] My family was very concerned for my mental health because, like, I was like, I just want to go to the jungles.

[00:56:42] And I don't know why it feels like the right step. And after I did that, I walked into a producer's office and he wanted to know what I'd been doing for the last year. And I was going in for this role. And I was telling him about my work and mission work and how I worked in Skid Row. And the next thing I knew, I went from having a two episode character to a three year contract because they took everything that I had done in the missions work and with Skid Row. And they made it a character. And I had a television job for three years because of it. Sometimes when you jump into the dark and you do things that just don't make sense. Just like even in the journey, it felt weird at times because I was so lonely. I missed making art. I felt like I was in the wilderness. I didn't know what the next step was gonna be, but the next thing I knew, it completely made up like a foundation for the next step of my life. So I encourage you to find people who are doing what you love to do who and be prepared for them. You know, I asked directors if I can be in their rooms. I'm always prepared for them to say no, and I'm always prepared to still be a fan and to still ask them the next time, because I want to learn.

[00:57:55] And it's scary. But, you know, if people are rejecting you like it might not be because they don't want me in their room. It might be because they're like, this is gonna be a really hard project. And I don't really have time to train right now. What I need to do is get this done and I'm gonna bring you in on the next thing. Does that make sense? So, you know, asking and getting rejected or showing up and feeling like you have failed, being in a place where you don't know the next step. There's always a voice that's leading you.

[00:58:23] And just follow it like you're not far from it. But sometimes it takes that leap and is just like nothingness.

[00:58:32] Yeah. Yeah. So the question.

[00:58:36] Definitely. This show is written for everybody. This show is for all ages. This show is for everyone. And I think it will be fun for everybody. And men are represented and men are represented in a positive way. And it's been very thoughtful on our part. And Sheryl has been such a leader on theme and story. And her dramaturge is unbelievable. And but she has pushed this idea so hard and with so much clarity that I think. Absolutely. And I I can't wait to hear it what you think.

[00:59:10] Can we extend the question a little bit to invite you all to talk about, like, what is the space for an ally? Or maybe there isn't like in what the work you're doing. Maybe it needs to be this space that is protected. But do you have like kind of a similar kind of feedback for people in terms of ally ship?

[00:59:30] I think it's really important to remember that we all live in the same space. We as humans are predisposed to create an in-group versus outgroup whether we want to or not. That is something that is hardwired in the back of our brain and we're always going to do it unless we choose to step in to situations where we're exposed to different stories, different narratives. Ask other people what it's like. And so I think in terms of should men be included in the women's empowerment movement in general, men are already an integral piece of it because you are part of our lives.

[01:00:09] Thank you. Time for one more question. Oh, we have two more questions. OK. The one here.

[01:00:16] One of you guys said what did you want to be when you grow up?

[01:00:24] Oh, I love that. Yeah. Can we just briefly go down the row and just say, you know, what was kind of your in your memory? That's a great question. What did you want to be when you grow up?

[01:00:34] So my son doesn't know this. Well.

[01:00:40] Mommy wanted to be a journalist. I want it to be Oprah.

[01:00:44] And a lot of parts of me still want to be Oprah.

[01:00:48] So I wanted to be a marine biologist, but only because I took an aptitude test and it told me I should be that. And the word sounded really cool. And people told me I could swim with dolphins. Turns out I don't like swimming.

[01:01:05] I wanted to be a doctor who designs, who designed medical equipment, so I actually studied biology and mechanical engineering in college. And even though I'm a banker today, the part that I love most about my job is that I get to design new things and think about our technology. So it's kind of come full circle. It's a little bit different, though.

[01:01:27] I also wanted to be a marine biologist, but not because I took a test, it was because I wanted to swim with dolphins truly, fully. The only reason I wanted to be my marine biologist was so I could be around sea animals. Yeah, but I did not do well in biology or science, period.

[01:01:45] I just wasn't an academic. I am where I belong.

[01:01:49] My first love was music and as a child I was very obsessed with and focused on writing music and learning how to play music.

[01:01:57] I wanted to be on Broadway and I didn't know I could.

[01:02:03] All right. Last question.

[01:02:06] How do you get by being the only girl in a male space? Amazing question. In most spaces.

[01:02:12] I am the only woman on my teams with the people I lead in the meetings I go to.

[01:02:18] And for a long time I thought like, Oh, well, I'm the only woman, so I shouldn't speak up. And I at this point love being the only woman in the room. I love that they notice when I walk in. I love that people are just as interested in what I say as they are concerned if I don't say anything. And so for me, I love being in that space because I've earned it. I've done my work. And I deserve a seat at that table, just like you deserve a spot in your section. The fact that you've been the only one for you said eight years. Did you say eight years means that you were like you were an expert at what you do. And so when you walk in, make sure they know you're there. Like, don't sit back. Don't be afraid to make suggestions because they're all better because you're there. And we talked about joy. And I said being in the moment, like those moments where you're there and, you know, there's a reason why you're there, as is like. Those are the moments of joy, because you're you're where you're supposed to be.

[01:03:26] And acknowledging that sometimes it's hard, you know, sometimes it's really hard and embrace who you are authentically. Try as hard as you can. And it's a day to day thing. Like some days you are going to just feel like, I don't want to work hard at this, you know, because sometimes it requires a lot of effort. Firstly, I think it's fierce. Secondly, I think the trombone is one of the coolest instruments in the history of the world and that I am always the only woman in the room in my field as well. And. I take the subway to work a lot, and I used to go two subway stops before I had to walk into the rehearsal room and tell myself that I was worthy. And I just used to repeat that. And I would walk in the freezing cold because I live in New York. You know, I am worthy. I am worthy. I am worthy. And it just allowed me to walk into the room. I also feel that as a female leader or as a female trombone player, we're given the privilege to have a platform. And as Kristolyn and said before, it's really a way to help encourage other people to take that platform as well. So congrats. Bravo. And congratulations to you. That is awesome. [Applause]

[01:04:50] Speak to that because you know brown sister, to brown sister. OK. The best thing you can do three things. Have friends who are women who love you, who support you, who you can talk to when you have bad days with the men. You don't want to take any anger out on anybody. Let your friends be there so you can vent. Two, best thing you can do is be yourself and love what you do. Because you're asked. You asked. You know what?

[01:05:19] What is a man going to get out of seeing *Bliss* being at a show run by women led by women.

[01:05:29] You are going to learn so much about what we care about what we need. And that's something that you're going to do for those boys in your section. You showing up, being your full lovely self, not letting them get away with anything. It only teaches them to be a better ally. It only teaches them how to be better when they're when they're interacting with women. Because when we shrink back and we get scared,

[01:05:55] You become complicit with silence. So just being yourself. It it it also like empowers men because they feel like they have someone they can ask questions to. And have been, you know, teaching men how to be friends with women is a huge thing as well. So those are the two.

[01:06:15] Did I say three or two? It's just like two, Be yourself and have a great support group that you can go home to your mom, your sisters, your girlfriends.

[01:06:26] Yeah. And just like really love what you do. Your passion is going to affect any group that you're in the room with. That's the first thing I always tell myself when I go into a room dominated by male creatives is they are going to be better if you are authentically yourself and enjoying your job because your passion. And when you confront them about notes on your character, it's not because you're trying to, like, shine or like be big. It's because you care about how it looks and how it sounds and the product that's powerful enough.
[Applause]

[01:07:01] I would also add too is to, I think after eight years, you pretty much have a good idea of the community in that space.

[01:07:09] I would just advise that you enter and keep being engaged in that community, knowing that you're of that community and in it as well, and not with the assumption that because you are one of that, everyone else is against the one. I think there's really important when we're talking about forming friendships and having on the ally ship boys and men are just as capable as being good sounding boards and good friends as well. So it's about understanding how you present yourself and how aware you are really affirming your values. And so just understanding that oftentimes this this feminism conversation sounds like a competition or a defense. And I want to challenge that, because if we are being inclusive and intentional about embracing diversity, there has to be grace given on the entire spectrum of gender. So I would just add that as an advice to just know that just because you're a one doesn't mean everyone else is against.

[01:08:14] All right. That was a great question. Thank you so much. Thank you so much to our panelists. I really appreciate the time that you spend with us today. And we are so thankful for the work that you're doing in our community and also telling that story up on the Fifth Avenue stage. So just thank you so much. Gratitude for you sharing yourselves with us tonight. Thank you so much.

[01:08:38] So Chantey Adams, our star, Jennifer Williams, Kristolyn Lloyd, Emma Lively, and Sheryl Kaller, thank you to the audience. Thank you so much for being here. Thank you to Seattle Public Libraries. And we will see you at *Bliss* or at our next community conversations.

[01:08:55] We'll see you at the next one, everybody.

[01:08:57] This podcast was made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. To listen to more library event podcasts, visit www.spl.org/podcasts.