

00;00;35;05 - 00;01;54;04

Jennifer

Today's guest is contemporary circus director, producer, and performer Natano Fa'anana. We had Natano join us this year for the APATA Award presentations, and we're really excited to get down and have a chat with him in person, over Zoom, so that we can share his creative pathway with our students and teachers all listening today. Drawing inspiration from his Samoan roots, Natano has carved a unique path and achieved national and international recognition through his work as a multifaceted artist for a string of renowned companies. He's helping to bring to life; 'Chasing Smoke' - Australia's first Indigenous circus show. Natano's also Producer for Moogahlin Performing Arts who produce and support First Nations artists. In Casus Creations, alongside co-founders Jesse Scott and Lachlan McAuley, this is where the Natano gets to represent a collective of humanity, of cultures, genders, and identities through contemporary artistry. But he does all this and still takes the time, where possible, to connect with students and communities like ours here at APATA, but also remote communities across Australia and the world. And we are so delighted to speak with him and welcome him to the APATA Podcast. So, enjoy this chat with Natano Fa'anana.

00;02;21;25 - 00;03;17;23

Jennifer

And it's been said, well, you've said in the past that you like to create pieces with real stories, with a human touch, and it seems that everything you do incorporates the lived experiences of the people and performers that you work with. And so, I guess that's what we're going to talk about today, is your lived experiences and find out a little bit about who you are; the past, present and future of Natano Fa'anana. So, we'll start with... Welcome Natano, and please tell us where you were born and raised and let's hear a little bit about you.

00;03;17;23 - 00;04;21;23

Natano

Thank you, or Fa'afetai lava Jennifer. Thank you for that amazing intro. I hail, or my people hail from the Islands of Samoa, so my father's from Palauli a village in Savai'i, and my mother is from Fagamalo also from Savai'i. But we were raised...born and raised in Aotearoa. So, I was born in Wellington, well Lower Hutt actually, and grew up a little bit in Porirua and then moved up to Auckland with the family and lived in Avondale and Mangere for a little bit longer. Before migrating to Australia and this was in the eighties and we moved to a little town called Ipswich outside Brisbane of which there I was raised and most of my schooling and my childhood was there and you know, proudly Samoan, proudly from New Zealand and in the sense that that was always reflected in our, in our music, and our home, in our arts, and all our dances.

00;04;21;23 - 00;04;55;14

Natano

We maintained our culture through all our ceremony practices and dances whenever we could. So, we're really quite lucky to have parents that were excited about continuation of story and our culture, but also assimilating and working with our newfoundland. Which was really important to acknowledge. You know, early on too. I do recall my father and my mother always reminding us that we were on other people's land, and to, and to really be mindful of that.

00;04;55;24 - 00;05;31;15

Natano

Yeah. Because, you know, it would be...the tables would be turned or changed if we were those people and in our own respective lands. So yeah, we've been brought up to be respectful of Aboriginal culture, old culture, and the lands that we tread. And so, I went to Silkstone State School in Ipswich, then Bremer State High School where I was blessed to have - not worked closely or schooled closely with these particular teachers, but they were in the periphery.

00;05;31;25 - 00;05;57;12

Natano

My subjects were ones that I selected where I was more sporty and less into the arts. Back then, however, Mrs. Ryan, Mrs. Bull and Mrs. Kelly, these teachers were always just in the background, tapping me on the shoulder, going you know you ought to consider, you know, performing or art and stuff like that. So, they always resonated with me, so much so that in my early twenties I disappeared off the scene.

00;05;57;12 - 00;06;28;06

Natano

I went down to my little I train journey down to Sydney where I just went on a bit of an exploration of self-discovery that didn't really include arts culture. I went off and down a different tangent, but I circled back. Ten years later, at the age of 30 I, I discovered art again where I, I was given a brochure to try out a circus and I did this as a, as an adult.

00;06;28;09 - 00;06;53;17

Natano

I was 29 at the time, and I went to do an adult circus class. And it was a day that I just discovered this newfound joy and love and attraction to the arts, but also through physicality. I loved; I love being really physical. I love being sporty. I didn't like team sports. I was point blank not wanting to be competitive and it's not me.

00;06;54;22 - 00;07;04;06

Natano

Whereas this was a sport, I guess a sport where I was like, wow, I can merge, merge my creativity with physicality.

00;07;04;06 - 00;07;05;11

Jennifer

Yeah.

00;07;05;11 - 00;07;52;13

Natano

And then more excited, as I tapped away at that just as a hobby, I realised, wow, this could also be a newfound tool of expressing my culture and my people instead of, instead of dance, or music, or singing, or what we're used to seeing. Our people share our stories. I did it through circus. Well, I set out to do that through circus and that since that time I always at the forefront of my mind was talking about representing our culture, our people through whatever medium, whether it was my contemporary dance or my aerials in the air or basing and throwing people around. I was still doing that. But, back of my mind I was...representing our people

00;07;52;13 - 00;07;57;13

Jennifer

Amazing.

00;07;57;13 - 00;08;06;14

Natano

Yeah. And so that was 15 years ago. I started circus and now I'm 45 and I'm still, still chucking people around.

00;08;07;01 - 00;09;02;07

Jennifer

I guess in the circus, too. We've spoken to other circus people like Dr. Kristy Seymour, who I think you might know, where discovering circus you might not take that that path I guess NICA wasn't there all those years ago, only 15 years ago, but might have just been in the beginning sort of phases where circus performers really discover their own way of learning and they find those trainers, and they find those programs that are going to give them what they need to get that skill, and acquire that skill, and learn that and perfect it, and then find the next thing. What do I need to learn now?

Like circus performers seem to be these independent learners who travel their own path, in their own way. And like you said, it might be a rocky road, but you get there.

00;09;02;16 - 00;09;42;22

Natano

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely. And coincidentally and funnily enough, Kristy Seymour was one of the trainers, she headed Flipside Circus back then and she gave me my first job as a circus trainer, which in there, in that wonderful school, I forged my craft as an independent artist. But yeah, I'm, I'm quite proud of the fact that I am what I call backyard trained. So, I don't belong to an institute. I didn't train with an institution or learn from a NICA or Flying Fruit Fly Circus. And I guess that wasn't being available to me, largely because I was thirty at the time.

00;09;42;22 - 00;09;43;05

Natano

Yeah,

00;09;43;05 - 00;10;01;19

Natano

So very unconventional in terms of learning what it is to be an acrobat at that time. But it really served me, it served me because look, back then there weren't many of us people that even looked like us.

00;10;01;19 - 00;11;28;17

Natano

So not only Pasifika people, but anyone that was brown. There weren't any people, if at all, anyone on stages that looked like us. And so, it was with that created a fire in my belly to work hard and acknowledge that the pathways weren't designed or built for people like us. So don't complain about it. Create new pathways. Make a new road. The major companies weren't interested in employing someone who looked like us because we don't have this finesse, or fine lines or balletic movement that is delivered by amazing acrobats of that sort. But those who move like us and that channel, ancient, sort of drive dance or we're in the ground when we when we move and, you know, proudly so at that time there wasn't really a want for that kind of aesthetic. But we found the right people that we could collaborate with who are like minded and go, hey, let's, let's explore and celebrate our respective cultures and use it on a platform. And then that was done underground. We would hire out little warehouses in Brisbane just to put up some performances that celebrate and explore the people that we are.

00;11;28;17 - 00;12;05;00

Natano

Through our various styles of performance and thankfully generated a market, essentially created a new market and one of them so Polytoxic was my first company of which I was an ensemble member and Polytoxic was a beautiful celebration of Australiana and Pacifika and we just, we just explored that collision, you know, we had whip crackers and a ballet dancer, and then we had us, you know, merging Sasas or, you know, Samoan dance with some of the Australian stuff.

00;12;05;02 - 00;13;06;24

Natano

But it was very experimental and found its place. It was quite a celebrated movement, but it's also, one which I'm hugely proud to be part of that. And back then the world wasn't ready for it. But we were. And, and excitedly out of this beautiful platform called Polytoxic, this company which still goes to this day, Briefs was formed, which was my first company that I created with my brother and brother-in-law, which was a crazy, exciting cabaret show that explores masculinity in all its forms. And again, culture was woven into that and that was a vessel to share our Pacifika cultures around the world. You know, this was an underground movement that we put on in a warehouse, in a bookstore, in West End, Brisbane and which was like slapped together with cello tape and hope. And from there it just generated this interest from around the way.

00;13;06;24 - 00;13;29;00

Natano

Everyone was like, 'Hey, what's this show with six young men throwing themselves around talking about culture and masculinity and doing mad skills in the air and on the ground. And next minute we're flying around the world, full of which still today I'm no longer with Briefs, my brother and brother-in-law manage the company, of which I still love and support.

00;13;29;00 - 00;13;29;08

Jennifer

Yeah

00;13;30;14 - 00;13;46;22

Natano

But they're currently in Sweden doing a big tour there. And, and it's just, it's a, it's a phenomenon now, Briefs is gangbusters hey! And that's a group of us from Grafton and Ipswich, Queensland, like...

00;13;46;22 - 00;13;48;27

Jennifer

It can be done.

00;13;48;27 - 00;13;49;29

Natano

Absolutely.

00;13;51;04 - 00;14;07;01

Jennifer

Yes. I actually read about how you started that it was Fez and your brother-in-law that had a lot to do with your introduction to Circus. And they said something about you having the physique of an acrobat and the kookiness of a clown and they knew that circus was for you.

00;14;07;22 - 00;14;26;01

Natano

Yeah, well, that's it. Yeah. My brother-in-law, Mark Winmill, he was quite pivotal. Well, both of them were but Mark, in particular as the acrobat would always say a comment about me having this physicality. I was quite agile. I had no problem throwing myself around, even in my late twenties, I was like, 'Oh yeah, I'll try that.' I had no fear.

00;14;26;21 - 00;15;22;27

Natano

And also, yes, a kookiness in this place with respect they would actually call me black Charlie Chaplin because I would, you know, I had no problem being goofy and and just, you know in how we are Polynesians just like to have a laugh. Yeah, and yeah. So it was, he was quite instrumental in really encouraging me to do that. And then when I decided to go, 'Oh, you know what, I want to pursue this as a, as a thing, as a, as an acrobat. What is it to be a circus artist?' They were quite instrumental in finding me that job with Kristy Seymour at Flipside Circus and then forging a place in Polytoxic. And then we created Briefs together. And then even up to that, when I was in the middle of Briefs, you know, in the first four years, Briefs was chugging along, really making laneways into the international market.

00;15;24;07 - 00;16;23;27

Natano

I felt this need to also pursue other avenues as an artist. The cabaret world and the variety world is fun and I love it. But there's also another I was just hungry to share. Continue sharing our culture,

our stories, but in other ways, other formats. And so contemporary was the other method that I started researching, which was not too far to access, to be honest, because Brisbane has one of the most amazing companies in terms of contemporary performance around the world called CIRCA and out of CIRCA I made some really great friends and we would just hang out and from there we were like, 'Hey, let's make our own company. And that was Casus. Back then it was Casus Circus, and we made this show called Knee Deep, and we were so poyo we had no money. But we had, you know, we had passion and drive.

00;16;24;10 - 00;16;24;18

Jennifer

Yeah.

00;16;24;23 - 00;17;04;14

Natano

Yeah. And with our little op-shop costumes, which was just basic, we looked like waiters actually we just had white shirts and black shorts or black pants and eggs. We were like, 'Hey, let's make a show with eggs.' Because now my colleague and co-director of Casus, Jesse Scott, recalls an image on his fridge growing up where his mum and dad, his dad was standing on two dozen eggs and his mum was on his shoulders. And so, with that image, that photo in there, so he was like, Oh, let's play with that and we'll quickly just

00;17;04;14 - 00;17;09;21

Jennifer

Just to confirm the eggs aren't broken here, they're full. Just half in the carton

00;17;09;21 - 00;17;12;10

Natano

They're in the carton, just normal eggs.

00;17;12;23 - 00;17;14;23

Jennifer

She's on his shoulders and no eggs broken.

00;17;15;14 - 00;19;03;13

Natano

Yeah. No, eggs broken. Yeah. Different story when we were experimenting, making this. So, we broke a few, we broke a few eggs. But yeah, we made a show with eggs, and we quickly discovered that acrobatics had this strange parallel with eggs in terms of the human body. So, with human bodies, we can balance each other around a certain way, as you do with eggs. So, there was a strength and fragility. And we played with those parallels and that small show 'Knee Deep' where we played with strength and fragility that that was what rocketed my career. I guess it was quickly discovered in an Adelaide Fringe by a producer from the UK who immediately was taken by it and took the show. He was, he was extremely emotionally moved by the show, which was really interesting because that was the kind of response that we would have 'Knee Deep', which, at the time we were making a show that was just dear to us. And we found then quickly that that was, it had a response and a movement and created these emotional responses. In so much to say that people were hungry for it and, and we took the show. Yeah. From there on, that was 2012, and from there on we were, we travelled the world with our little show of eggs and our op-shop costumes. I've got to mention that also, 'Knee Deep' which was kind of a game changer in many ways, both for myself and the Australian industry that I proudly and unapologetically wove my culture into contemporary circus.

00;19;03;23 - 00;19;32;23

Natano

Back then, like I said, there wasn't much of that. It was all very... it was all very white, so then contemporary was from Europe, so, it's all very much influenced that way. But I put in there a thing called a Fa'ataupati which is a Samoan slap dance and wove it into an acrobatic scene, so it was like tumbling, flipping, throwing people around, but also slapping the body in time to the rhythm.

00;19;32;23 - 00;20;01;15

Natano

And so back then it was kind of, oh, for me it was a no brainer. But also, I remember challenging the norms, but that was a good thing because people it was an eye... just an awareness. Now people were like, 'Oh, well, you can actually, culture isn't something that has to be so separated from contemporary. It can be all in one. And I guess from there on in "Knee Deep' once again an affirmation that storytelling can be told whatever way you want.

00;20;02;02 - 00;20;38;22

Jennifer

You're sharing your culture, whatever way you want. Because I think you've said in the past too, that circus is, or physical theatre isn't a way that is normally in culture. Samoan culture or Pacifika culture isn't normally shared in that way. In that format. So, this was a new thing and a new way for people to experience. And I think you also said, like when you went to French Polynesia and performing it there in front of an audience full of French Polynesians was like one of the most moving experiences you've ever had.



00;20;39;15 - 00;22;08;24

Natano

Yeah, yeah. That was, that was quite breathtaking and really emotional for me in the sense that they're our people, but also their culture has been disrupted. Their language has been disrupted by the French, French government. The French, how can I say this, French colonialism. Yeah. And, and so where our people as Samoans have maintained our culture and songs and dance theirs hasn't. But they're us. They're our people. And yeah. And I was in a little island called a Raiatea, and it even has a level of complexity because that's one of our ancient islands that we have many stories about how sacred that place is where they still have marae, the remnants of marae and old ways which aren't necessarily discovered or exist in other parts of the Pacific Islands. But anyway, there was this makeshift tent on the on the beach in Raiatea with a sea of brown people and it was just magic, you know, that here was, you know, another Samoan/Pacifika man on stage doing old dance, slapping myself, throwing people around, catching people. But nevertheless, you know, there was this beautiful response that, you know, you could see the people thinking 'That's what we can do too.

00;22;09;21 - 00;22;32;15

Jennifer

Because it's not just it's not just about sharing your culture with people who've never seen it before. It's also sharing it with the people. It belongs to, which is a really important thing to do. And I guess that's what 'Chasing Smoke' was about in creating that first Australian Contemporary Circus show with Indigenous people and Indigenous performers and sharing their stories as well.

00;22;33;04 - 00;22;54;10

Natano

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I was the director of that show, but I would say that's just it's not been my I'm not fond of that term. What I was a facilitator of their stories. You know, I'm a blackfella from another land. And they were gracious enough, and kind enough to allow me to assist in that.

00;22;54;27 - 00;23;24;20

Natano

And there's a delicacy around telling other people's cultural stories. And I was allowed that, which was great. And the trickiest moment was the six voices, six performers, all of which had their unique stories, which was, you know, it was, it was challenging and, and uplifting, and traumatic, and inspiring - all of that in one. And, you know, unbeknownst to us, there was a lot of firsts when we were doing that, making "Chasing Smoke".

00;23;26;00 - 00;23;48;11

Natano

And so, there were things that we you know, the beauty of hindsight is the things I could change. But the main thing that I would say that we wouldn't change is - giving it a go. You know, we, far too often have, is that there are obstacles or barriers for people like us, especially for people of First Nations. Obviously, there's been barrier after barrier.

00;23;49;06 - 00;24;04;24

Natano

And so, I, I don't apologise for the fact that I, as an artist I am also a punk. You know, I don't have a problem kicking down walls and especially kicking down walls for people of more marginalised than myself. You know, it's worth it.

00;24;06;06 - 00;24;32;09

Jennifer

Yeah. And a big part of what you do also is you mentioned that you like to take time out and go out into communities and be a trainer again and like step away from that facilitator role and be in community. And you've just come out from Wilcannia with the Fruit Fly Circus and Dylan Singh, and Louise Moriarty from Outback Theatre for Young People.

00;24;32;09 - 00;24;47;14

Jennifer

Yeah, that's a big part of what you do too, is just getting training in those communities that might need a bit of a lift and might need a bit of something different. How did that go and how does that work?

00;24;48;03 - 00;26;00;13

Natano

I feel wonderful. It's actually getting, it takes a bit of time for me to make sure that I allow the time to do that. But it's important for me to work with communities. There's a lot of complexity, my years is a combination of majority producing, creative producing, directing shows, and with that comes these amazing experiences. And yeah, which is great for the next project, but for me it's important to share those experiences and take some time out. Just, just to sit the mob and go out to places like Wilcannia or Riverina, which I have a connection to. It's been a while back. Kuranda up in Cairns where Blakflip And it's here that we go in there with the premise of teaching circus because that's the background that I have in terms of artistry. But it's more for me about again going back to how whatever genre or medium it is like circus in this context, it's about using that to continue telling your story and certainly telling a continuation of your culture of, of all the songs you had.

00;26;00;13 - 00;26;31;01

Natano

If you, if you think you can merge those two, you know, the next time, maybe circus wouldn't be appropriate. But I do have some background in dance or storytelling of other sorts, so I'll just use those skill sets as a means of continuing telling stories. Sometimes, you know, you might push a small pebble along and that's all that's the outcome for that is. That we bring to those places. But that's better than not, you know.

00;26;31;12 - 00;26;55;15

Jennifer

Yeah, I guess that's a really good tip for teachers like listening to that. Like you want to know who your students are, you want them to be able to share their stories. So, getting to know them and helping them tell their stories in a way that's comfortable and safe and is a really great thing to do. And you seem to be able to do that with quite like skill and reverence to who those people are.

00;26;56;15 - 00;27;20;26

Natano

Yeah, well, I'd like to think so. But also, I was thinking earlier today, like if I look at a community and there is all the same poignancy, it's not right. What you're here to do is in the correct and not conducive to what that community needs, be okay with leaving and having that I went out there, like you said, with Flying Fruit Fly Circus and Outback to teach circus workshops.

00;27;20;26 - 00;28;09;23

Natano

And what I found myself doing with because he's a Wiradjuri man with family connections to Wilcannia is that we sat mostly with Uncles and Aunties just having yarns to discover what it is to learn what it is that the community wants in terms of artistry. And also, on top of that, it's like being people of culture. You know, me, Pacifika, Dylan Wiradjuri it's just out of cultural courtesy to get to know who the locals are and it's just sitting a lot of the time is just sitting in and through out of that. It's a very non-linear, non-European way of obtaining information. But we're okay with that, because you just, you just listen and feel out what it is people want.

00;28;10;14 - 00;28;53;05

Natano

We're really grateful, Dave, especially with Dylan's connection to them, which he discovered that there was there a there's an already an 'In' to come back. When we come back, it's like, okay, we've talked enough with people to go, 'Oh, yeah, you want your music, dance and a bit of circus. That's let's bring that. Andnd also bringing in, not specifically making it just for kids, which is great. Kids deserve a bit of an outlet and enjoy but also inter-generational teachings and working so, you know,

so coming back and facilitating workshops or play with the elders as well as the young ones. So every where's different.

00;28;53;13 - 00;29;06;23

Jennifer

That was something that was quite interesting too at the presentation for Leilani Collins. But because in speaking with her family, you realised that you were related to her in some way as well.

00;29;06;24 - 00;29;07;17

Natano

Like, yeah.

00;29;07;28 - 00;29;38;05

Jennifer

It's just the culture of things, you know, I'm a Polynesian myself, I'm Māori. I was just at a Tangi this weekend and people there who were facilitating it found out they're related to most of the people there. And I think that that's what's beautiful about our culture is that you find these roots and those roots continually spread out and connect you to all these people.

00;29;38;13 - 00;30;09;15

Jennifer

And related or not, you, you seem to be doing the same thing. You're spreading these roots out across the world. And it's something that's really important with your work. That's and you know, now we go into Moogahlin Performing Arts. Yeah, you're a producer for them and coming up for the 50th Sydney Opera House celebrations, Moogahlin will be a part of that 50-year celebration, performance and program.

00;30;09;15 - 00;30;13;14

Jennifer

Can you tell us about what you do with Moogahlin and yeah experience there.

00;30;14;07 - 00;30;43;09

Natano

Yeah, well, I'm right now actually at the Moogahlin office, which is like a blue moon. I, you know, the pandemic has meant everyone works from home by now in Sydney, actually sitting with Ali Murphy-Oates and Stephen Barker, who are my Managing Director and Producers. And it's actually really great to be in the space together. What we do here is make those connections with predominantly New South Wales based Nations.

00;30;43;23 - 00;31;22;27

Natano

And historically Moogahlin has been one who's been really quite instrumental in being like sector development, so they would facilitate other artists to create works on First nations basis and ship it that along with using their resources. And now more recently becoming more and more a production house where they would create their own shows. And with that, a beautiful intersection happened where there was time created on my plate due to the pandemic and also me being less of a performer, and more director and producer with Casus.

00;31;23;07 - 00;31;51;25

Natano

So, there was this period of time during my week was like, okay, I'm available. I saw notifications because I'm old school friends with Lily Shearer, who's one of the Artistic Directors, and I applied for a job, and I got this job producing them based on my touring experiencing. Being an independent artist actually worked in my favour because one, as an artist you have to learn how to be your own directo, and producer, and in many ways your own production manager.

00;31;51;25 - 00;32;12;10

Natano

And with that skill set, I was able, I am able, to serve the new needs of Moogahlin where I help create touring. So all the shows they're making now we make together, but I then put them on the road. And so what the show you're talking about, it's just a number of shows on Moogahlin's table at the moment, is really exciting.

00;32;12;26 - 00;33;44;11

Natano

But the show you're referring to is called 'The Visitors', and that's part of an exciting year for the Sydney Opera House, it's 50th year anniversary and 'The Visitors' has this, which is a co-commissioned word Sydney Theatre Company and Moogahlin, and it's going to be part of that program and it's really exciting on multiple levels. You know, this is the first First Nations show, yes in partnership with STC. But it's you know, it's really about all the creative leads are First Nations, all the, or, as much of the crew or the cast are First Nations, costume designer, lighting designer - all of them First Nations. And so it's really exciting to see all that kind of, that kind of methodology

happening and being accepted in this day and age. It's really exciting to be part of that. And like I said earlier, you know, I'm a blackfella from another rock, a much smaller rock in Samoa in the Pacific. But I'm welcomed into this space to be part of that family of creators. Wesley Enoch, who is Quandamooka - Stradbroke Island, he's the director of 'The Visitors'. The as was written is written by a Muruwari woman named Jane Harrison, which is just an exciting team and, you know, pioneering and formidable.

00;33;45;02 - 00;33;58;00

Natano

It's not these are strong anchor points of people in in the arts community that are making this work. And the cast is yet to be fleshed out and it's going to be really exciting.

00;33;58;16 - 00;34;27;24

Jennifer

Awesome. You're also senior producer for Yirramboi Festival last year and you're a big part of festivals like Brisbane Festival as well. What is your experience in the festival world. Because that's a lot different to, you know, getting on the Sydney Opera House stage. That's a lot freer, a lot more expressive, a bit more fun. But how do you how do you find that whole festival experience? Tell us about that as well.

00;34;28;23 - 00;34;57;23

Natano

On the festival experience as well. There's two parts to that responding to that question. Historically, most of my pop playing in the festival is creating works that would be featured in the festival. And then at some point out and even though when that happened, I decided mentioned where I was like facilitator, or I work in festivals as a producer to help create a body of works in the festivals.

00;34;58;07 - 00;35;34;12

Natano

So, you're referring to Yirramboi, which is again another First Nations focused festival based in Melbourne. And my job was to curate sections of the program, i.e., the ceremony and the closing ceremony and then scatterings of other programming throughout that season. Yeah, it's, it's a certainly a shift in the way you create as a creative person. You, you make the shows and you put them in that work and that's essentially complete.

00;35;34;20 - 00;35;48;03

Natano

And then as a producer, there's a lot of other things you have to consider, like the logistics and placement of certain works and how they're going to be managed seamlessly.

00;35;48;14 - 00;35;57;22

Jennifer

Yeah, telling the story I suppose at the same time and there's a theme to that festival, what is that theme related to that production?

00;35;57;22 - 00;35;59;13

Natano

Precisely yes.

00;35;59;25 - 00;36;00;08

Jennifer

Yeah.

00;36;00;22 - 00;36;29;18

Natano

Yeah. And that was a wonderful experience that I, you know, again, surrounded by other people of culture that were, were the leads in that and making of that, of that festival and from that was also a wonderful progression to other festivals and this job now that I have at Moogahlin.

00;36;29;18 - 00;36;56;02

Jennifer

So, I also know that very soon you're going to be heading overseas and this is for the Churchill Fellowship that you were a recipient of in 2020. And because of, of course, COVID and lockdowns and things, this is your time. You finally get to fly (crossing fingers). Tell us about what's going to be happening with your Churchill Fellowship research and what you're going to be doing.

00;36;56;22 - 00;37;27;14

Natano

Yeah. So, my Churchill Fellowship investigation is about other First Nations, First People, directors, or choreographers, or leaders in arts practice around the world and how they weave in their culture

into modern theatre practice. You know, it's, it's quite a challenging one, to be honest, because there isn't that many of us around the world and if there are, they are hard to find.

00;37;27;14 - 00;37;56;17

Natano

I was lucky enough to connect with five individuals that are willing to share some of the cultural practices of which they bring into the theatre practice. And those countries are your homeland, and my birth land Aotearoa, Jack Gray at Atamira Dance (<https://atamiradance.co.nz/>). And then I'm working with Margaux up in Canada, in Vancouver who runs Talking Stick.

00;37;56;24 - 00;38;38;01

Natano

It's a First Nations Indigenous festival there (<https://www.facebook.com/talkingstickfest/>). A lady, Vicki Dela Amedume, of Ghanaian descent runs a circus company in London (<https://upswing.org.uk/>), Cambodia, Phare Circus (<https://pharecircus.org/>) and also Rotuma, which I'm really excited about. A little island of Fiji, which I'm going to work with a couple of directors there about their origin, their old mythological origin stories of Rotuma so, I'm pretty, I'm pretty stoked. Yeah. It's one of the few projects I'm doing that I'm actually okay about the reporting you know, I'm really excited to write about it.

00;38;38;10 - 00;38;58;05

Jennifer

Yeah, yeah. It sounds amazing and what an experience. And what is it like to be recognised I guess for the Sydney Meyer Fellowship for your work, these institutions that I've been around for quite a while like is that. Well, how does that feel.

00;38;58;10 - 00;39;24;29

Natano

Mm. Look it's quite a layered - I, I'm, I'm not going to, I'm not going to water this down for your listeners because the reality is it's, it's hard work for people like us. It's, it's been really hard work. And those accolades came at a time where I was pretty much ready to quit. And I'm not saying this as a deterrent.

00;39;25;05 - 00;40;27;23

Natano

I was ready to quit because the amount of work one has to do to survive as an artist in general is hard. The amount of work one has to do in the cultural space as an artist is nuts. It's really, really



hard. And those accolades and awards came at a point where, like I said, I was at a, I was at a turning point and I wasn't excited about how poor I was, how the challenges that we've been working on to change at that point, the last 12 years, hadn't shifted that much? But the big but is with those achievements that I have now, Australia, if not the world, is listening to my voice in many ways and I'm able to, not change of my own accord, but I'm at least able to talk to people like yourself, other directors, other people, like-minded people who are at a certain tier where we can influence change.

00;40;28;06 - 00;40;43;01

Natano

And, and those achievements like Sydney Meyer Fellowship really did help me financially. It was a good time in my life where I was. I was in debt.

00;40;43;01 - 00;40;48;01

Jennifer

Like most performing artists in the performing arts industry, it's been a hard couple of years.

00;40;49;03 - 00;41;16;12

Natano

Yeah, yeah. And the Churchill Fellowship was one where, I desperately wanted to learn from the greats around the world but could not afford it. Now I can. And with that information and knowledge, I know that I will be able to bring that back and only help create and share those experiences with others. Yeah. Only strengthen our sector and our communities.

00;41;17;01 - 00;41;27;27

Jennifer

Yeah. Yeah. And your guiding ethos of, of storytelling from with your own perspective and the perspective of the global First Peoples.

00;41;29;04 - 00;42;24;10

Natano

Yeah. Yeah. Of which all of everyone's different. Yeah. And how wonderful is that and how wonderful would that be to obtain some of that information of which we can come back and keep sharing with others and other educators? You know, there's a there's a there's definitely a risk where people in certain powers just presume that there is a blanket way of operating as First Peoples. You and myself you know relatively from the same region of the world. But we do have very different practices and cultural protocols and what is acceptable and not acceptable to bring into modern theatre. Same with Cambodia, same of Ghana, same Vancouver Indigenous people there. In

so many ways different, but with some other information at least we can have an approach about sensitivity, about how one brings in certain cultural voices.

00;42;27;11 - 00;42;59;01

Jennifer

natano. Who are the greatest teachers or mentors? That is informed your your journey into physical theater and circus, and but also not just that your life mentors let's get into it because I feel like that's going to be a few but there is a few really made a difference and set you on a path that you're headed down now.

00;43;00;12 - 00;43;32;18

Natano

Oh, that's a good one, I actually haven't been posed with that question before, but I'll give it a go. All right, right off the top of my head the first one that came to mind was obviously my family, and then specifically my mother, who is just, I feel like she missed her calling as a performer, you know, I mean, happily the clown and happily the one who's really influential in terms of culture for making sure that any opportunity to get up to sing about it.

00;43;33;25 - 00;43;59;04

Natano

So that's my mum on that front. Rudy Mineur is a friend of mine who will say he was part of a circus movement in the 1990s and early 2000s. And he was, in my opinion, one of the most underrated acrobats in the world, and he is based in Brisbane, and he was just a man who, I continued to use his ethos, which was, 'Any information one must share.'

00;44;00;06 - 00;44;23;18

Natano

And, and so he was quite an instrumental person when I was a 30-year-old acrobat that he would just come in and anything he could share with me, he would, he could do it and also really positive about it. Yeah. You know, my handstands and climbs as aerialist was just using my climbs and he would say, 'Oh, you know, you did half a climb.'

00;44;23;25 - 00;44;49;16

Natano

How awesome is that? You know, your handstand was a little bit crooked, and you fell but, you know what? How good is that as a starting point?" You know, it was that sort of positivity that remained with me as a, as an artist. And, and so yeah, he's really been and his wife Tess Beck who were like second family and still continue to be that to this day.

00;44;49;16 - 00;45;07;21

Natano

How you know what I mean? This is life historically more recently which is, you know, interesting that does jump to my mind often. But Taika Waititi, you know, just seen another brother who looks like us doing his thing, sharing his craft.

00;45;08;01 - 00;45;19;21

Jennifer

He's an image that we see of ourselves into his work so often that it's, its other people don't realize it, but we're just going, Oh, my God, it's so kiwi, you know.

00;45;20;05 - 00;45;21;22

Natano

Isn't it? Yeah.

00;45;21;22 - 00;45;23;15

Jennifer

And I think that's what you do as well.

00;45;24;25 - 00;45;43;00

Natano

Well yeah, I would think oh my gosh. Just being on having his name on my name in the same will be a dream. But yet it is. And again, that sort of a Taika represents that thing that if he can do it, we can see, you know.

00;45;43;00 - 00;45;45;09

Jennifer

Yeah, it's that representation. Yeah.

00;45;45;16 - 00;45;46;00

Natano

Yeah.

00;45;46;17 - 00;46;20;10

Jennifer

Which I think was a beautiful thing about having you at the presentation. That elbow pad has a quite a large Pasifika community. They have a large African community and a large First Nations community and having you there was a really beautiful thing and having them perform their haka for the first time. That was really amazing. Just the cultural support that is in schools today for kids is a real delight to see and I'm so glad to have you as a part of that.

00;46;20;10 - 00;46;30;03

Jennifer

That was really gracious of you and the shout out to Meg Cooper from Mad Dance House for suggesting that you were the man for the job!

00;46;30;03 - 00;46;30;14

Natano

Hey.

00;46;30;25 - 00;46;31;09

Jennifer

She did.

00;46;31;09 - 00;46;32;11

Natano

I didn't know that.

00;46;34;03 - 00;46;35;26

Jennifer

Yeah. So, thank you, Meg.

00;46;36;19 - 00;46;38;01

Natano

Thank you, Meg,

00;46;38;02 - 00;47;10;18

Jennifer

From those mentors and teachers or what are the words of advice that you would give to kids wanting to get into performance today or performance of any kind, but especially physical theatre or just who are indigenous first nations, first peoples? What are your words of advice that come from your own mentors and teachers that you still called on today?

00;47;10;18 - 00;48;45;16

Natano

Look, be prepared for hard work. It is going to be hard knocks, for sure. But you know what? We are good people of culture. We know how to dust ourselves off, get back up and be okay with that. And the knocks are going to be regular. That's life. But just stay true to that drive, that passion, that motivation, which is, you know, for those, everyone's different, but for myself it's about our culture, and our people, and our voices and having that in the back of my mind, that's always, always worthwhile. Getting back to the dust yourself off. Yeah. Staying true to why you are an artist. If you are out there because you have this gift to share with the world, then be okay with that. If it doesn't resonate with the masses, with all your friends. So what? That's awesome. That's unique. And there's nothing wrong with that. And also sharing, you know, I've built my career on sharing my knowledge, of which most business models, and other successful artists or businesspeople say is the worst thing to do. I disagree. I share my knowledge with anyone who is willing to listen and more importantly, earn it, you know, information in my experience and my opinion isn't necessarily needed to be kind of just kept to yourself.

00;48;45;16 - 00;49;20;06

Natano

It doesn't create, it's not conducive to creating a stronger sector or building your community and, and always know that there's someone worse off than you. And help them out, you know, help a brother or sister out if they need it. Again, that's what I've done. And it's not conducive to the successful business models for the masses. But I can attest to being someone who now lives life where I feel fulfilled in most ways.

00;49;21;06 - 00;49;36;23

Natano

Financially, I am fine, my career is solid, my artistry is intact, and all of that was based on me to start finding people if they needed help. I would help them. And the universe, or whatever you believe in, looks after you.

00;49;37;12 - 00;49;52;25

Jennifer

Yeah. Sometimes you got to be a mentor when you're not ready yourself, you'll end up being a mentor or giving advice to those people. You might not be fully ready, but they are ready to accept what you have to share with them. Yeah.

00;49;53;03 - 00;49;56;20

Natano

Yeah, yeah. And pass that on. Yeah, yeah.

00;49;56;26 - 00;50;07;23

Jennifer

Cool that it's yeah, it's, it's. That's your cultural heritage shining through there. I think that that's sharing knowledge and stories.

00;50;08;24 - 00;50;09;07

Natano

Yeah.

00;50;09;10 - 00;50;15;03

Jennifer

What we, we ask this of everybody, but What are your big dreams?

00;50;15;19 - 00;50;36;03

Natano

My big dream is to be an artistic director of a major event or a festival. And I know that sounds, it does sound a little bit, even as I say it, it sounds out of character. But there is something that is appealing because most of my works have been ones that are really quite intimate, small scale and, you know, human.

00;50;36;27 - 00;50;58;04

Natano

Because, you know, there's an intention to think about it because I wanted the audience to connect to at some stage, because I think that that's only achievable in a small environment. But I would like to, I would like to deliver human connection, but on a massive scale. Yeah, yeah, I.

00;50;58;08 - 00;51;11;04

Jennifer

Know. If you say it, you've got to put it out there. Then it's in the universe. It's going to come back to you. So that's why we get people to say that big dream. Sometimes you have to say it out loud and the universe hears you it's, so you never know.

00;51;11;21 - 00;51;15;12

Natano

You never know hey!

00;51;15;12 - 00;51;24;16

Jennifer

I'll just ask a couple of quick questions like, Yeah, why do you love what you do? What do you love about it?

00;51;25;22 - 00;51;47;18

Natano

What do I love about it? Oh, there's multiple things. I'm really blessed to be who I am now. I get to travel, I get to travel the world, experience other cultures, other peoples that many people would only dream of. So I'm really grateful about that. And again, going back to that thing is whilst I'm traveling the world, I get to share my culture and my people with them as well.

00;51;49;09 - 00;51;51;08

Natano

That's a big plus for me.

00;51;52;08 - 00;52;15;27

Jennifer

Oh, thank you so much Natano Fa'anana from Casus Creations, Moogahlin Performing Arts and so many more things. You are a man of culture and connection and community, and we're so appreciative that you've been involved with APATA this year. And we can't wait for all the future gold that's coming your way and we hope we can be a part of it as well.

00;52;17;16 - 00;53;16;10

Natano

Fa'afetai lava, thank you very much Jennifer. Thank you for everyone listening. And I just put it out there. If anyone needs to reach out and connect with me, you're welcome to.