**No one is Listening ( a ghost story).**

**Episode 6. The void.**

**The podcast "Episode 6.The Void" explores the fear and challenges of memory loss in actors. Emma Williams and Vic Llewellyn discuss their personal experiences and interviews with professional actors. Saikat Ahamed, Clare Beresford, and Chris Bianchi share their terrifying moments of forgetting lines during performances. They recount incidents where actors had to improvise or rely on cues. The discussion also delves into scientific aspects of memory, referencing a case study of HM, who had his hippocampus removed, leading to severe memory loss. The podcast concludes with a reflection on the importance of the hippocampus in memory formation.**

Vic Llewellyn 0:00

No one is listening a podcast that explores ghosts, memory loss and feeling the fear.

Sam Halmarack ( Singing) 0:09

when the strange presence is near.

Sam Halmarack ( Singing) 0:13

You look around, the housse but there's...

Sam Halmarack ( Singing) 0:17

no

Sam Halmarack ( Singing) 0:18

body here,

Sam Halmarack ( Singing) 0:20

an Ivy wind blows, but the doors are closed. What is that emotion? FEAR?!!

Emma Williams 0:32

I used to watch a television programme called It'll be all right on the night. Do you remember that?

Vic Llewellyn 0:37

Yeah, ...

Emma Williams 0:38

I was thinking about this because we used to watch it, and we used to laugh at like, because it was, you know, actors who I don't know fell over or tripped up, or actors that suddenly, like, lost all their lines, forgot what they were saying.

Vic Llewellyn 0:51

Yeah.

Emma Williams 0:52

And we like watching my family, and think it was, like, hysterically funny,

Vic Llewellyn 0:55

yeah.

Emma Williams 0:56

But I think because I've been married to you now for 30 years, and for me, now that I I've seen it in some shows. I've I've watched you, and I can see it in your face when you're not 100% sure about what you're doing. And it's, it's no longer funny. It's now, for me personally, absolutely terrifying. I just get so stressed when I'm watching you, because I can see it, but I think it's just that I would share that, because that's changed radically from it being like a kind of humorous thing for being a really scary thing.

Saikat Ahamed 1:30

Everything goes when, when you lose your lines and you're looking at the void, you might as well be stripped naked and with a massive sign saying, Oh, just so you know this, he's not the character.

Clare Beresford 1:46

I've got nothing. So you've you're in the bottom of the pit going right, but you do have a show to do. So whilst you've fallen in the void, How are you going to reclimb this wall? Because you just felt and you got nothing? Yeah, it's a horrible, horrible feeling. I wouldn't wish it on anybody

Vic Llewellyn 2:08

But what about when you just suddenly forget something? What's that feel like?

Chris Bianchi 2:15

Cold sweat, panic.

Emma Williams 2:16

Because I think it's interesting that you've made a show that's got an element about an actor who, who forgets, right? Yeah, and, and very, it was very much from sort of your perspective. So you've spoken to three different people about this, who are all professional. So they have a successful career as professional actors. They earn their living out of that, out of that. Um, so, yeah. So who did you talk to?

Vic Llewellyn 2:45

I spoke to Saikat Ahamed.

Saikat Ahamed 2:48

I was doing Life of Pi, and I was playing the uncle, Mamagee really lovely part. And I was under studying the Father. We'd rehearse the father, we'd rehearse the understudy. Bits, not loads, but enough that I felt okay. I knew the lines. I thought I knew the lines. I mean, every time we'd done a run. And I was Word Perfect. So I was like, you know, absolutely not an issue.The guy playing father ,injured himself just before half, and I didn't, wasn't even aware I knew something had happened. He was limping, and I was like, oh, what's happened? And then suddenly the company manager came up to me and said, "he's off ,your playing Father"

Vic Llewellyn 3:30

I spoke to Claire Beresford,

Clare Beresford 3:33

I loved school, and I did well, but I don't think I did well because I was actually clever at some things. I think I did well because I was quite good at memorising.So in terms of, like, I really remember, I used to go out with a real maths Wiz, and I one day forgot the formula for a cylinder and and I asked him, and he was like, he'd forgotten it as well, but he just worked it out. I think I might have told you this once, he drew two circles, and he wrote down the formula for that, and he he worked it. I was like, wow, you, your brain works that out because, you know, maths, whereas I have just memorised it, and if the memory goes, I ain't got nothing.

Vic Llewellyn 4:15

I spoke to Chris Bianchi.

Chris Bianchi 4:17

I remember, I mean, working with, with Dame Judy all those years ago, and her first night of this play that we were in, you know, only had a small part, and she dried and that was reassuring. It was like, oh, right, okay, you're this great goddess of the stage, and you have a problem with it. So that was reassuring.

Saikat Ahamed 4:38

So I was kind of like, but I was like, right? I've gotta do this. It's my job. And I was like, I just went into it. And it was like, and literally, my heart was beating against my rib. My rib coach. I'm sure the audience could hear my heart pounding.....

Saikat Ahamed 4:59

And....

Saikat Ahamed 4:59

....Then I started just doing it, and it was like, out of body, and I was just like, I'm saying the lines I'm doing, the moves I'm doing. And actually, it was like, Oh, I've got this. I've absolutely got this. And it was all going well. And then there's a moment where the father gets really angry and starts shouting, and I did that, and I just kind of suddenly went, I have no idea what comes next.....Literally no idea. And I looked at the woman playing my wife, and I just, I was shouting, and I was thinking. I was saying to her, I can't do this. I can't do this, don't you, don't you see me struggling right here. Look at me. Look at me. I'm struggling or something like that. And it's like, that was Saikat...,and that was the character, but it wasn't the lines, and it only lasted about 10 seconds, and then I was back on it, but it was like, those 10 seconds felt like a year,

Sam Halmarack ( Singing) 5:55

FEAR!!

Clare Beresford 5:59

....then on the first night, because it's also like time to music and things. And I did have huge fear at the I don't know what the fearometer is, but the fear....it was like the nerves were really blocking any....instinct with the character I had. So I had, I put the my handwritten, almost illegible lines, like at the side of the stage, I think, between, between every scene and on that preview, I think I was like, using it as a bit of a crook, because I got a fear, like, I don't think the audience would noticing, but I just would check myself. And I was like, okay, I can do section by section. But then that became a bit of a thing where no one knew, but I had those crappy written out lines at the side, a hidden side of every village hall. I think for ages,

Clare Beresford 6:48

FEAR!!!

Chris Bianchi 6:53

I must have told you about years ago when....Peter Hall moved his company to bar Theatre Royal years and years ago, and I worked for him a few years before. And I thought, Oh, I'll jog his memory and see if he'll employ me again. And I went to see one of the previews of....Lady Windermeres Fan with Vanessa Redgrave and her daughter in and...

Chris Bianchi 7:21

Googie withers, I don't is this? This is name dropping that I shouldn't put into this. But she is old, old film star from way back when, and she was fairly advanced in years, and she had to do this huge long speech near the beginning of the play quite near, with a big explanation, and she totally dried....And...one of the Vanessa's daughters sat next to her and tried to help her through it. And then she was getting prompts. And then she finally stood up and said, I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen, I shan't be able to continue, and walked off. And in terms of drama, it was easily the best bit of the whole show. .... by a mile,... So it was, it was interesting. All that tension was just extraordinary. It was, it was electric.

Sam Halmarack ( Singing) 8:15

FEAR!

Emma Williams 8:18

We've been looking both of us reading books about memory. There's one by this guy called Eric R Candle, which is called In Search of memory, and he won the Nobel Prize for research into the science of the mind. And then there was another book, you know, the one, the science of memory. Did you you read that one? Didn't you as well?

Vic Llewellyn 8:38

Yeah, that's much more of a layman's book.

Emma Williams 8:41

There was a piece of information in both of them that I thought was really interesting. And this was about a case study about a person. They call them. They call him, HM, that's how he's described. And in 1953 when he was 27 he had an operation to stop his seizures,...and what he had is they removed his hippocampus, which I think is in the frontal lobe. It's quite like a chunk of the brain.

Vic Llewellyn 9:11

I don't think it's in the frontal lobe.

Emma Williams 9:13

Oh, right. Okay. Where do you think it is?

Vic Llewellyn 9:15

At the back of your brain. Here

Emma Williams 9:18

you're now pointing at your brain...on a podcast that's not going to work.

Vic Llewellyn 9:24

Its theback of my brain?

Emma Williams 9:26

I don't think it's there. I think the frontal lobe... but I'm going to check. I'm going to check that.

Vic Llewellyn 9:34

You need a diagram...

Emma Williams 9:37

Well, the picture that we'll put on for Episode Six will be the hippocampus, so everyone can actually see realistically where it is about that that's my solution for that problem. Anyway, he had this operation,...and it's completely cured him of his seizures, which was great, but it had a devastating effect on his memory because he was unable to convert new, short term memories into long term memories, so he would forget events just after they'd happened. He was studied by this woman called Brenda Milner. She studied him for 30 years, and each time she entered the room, he failed to recognise her, even though they had all these conversations and all this stuff. And it's actually really, really sad, because the quote from her is that "he couldn't acquire the slightest new piece of knowledge. He lives today, chained to the past in a sort of childlike world. You can say his personal history stopped at his operation".... so he wouldn't recognise himself in photographs. You know, he could only see himself as someone who was 27 he couldn't see that he was any older. But from that operation, they discovered that the hippocampus is vital in converting short term memory into long term memory. I

Clare Beresford 10:59

t's so weird when something you know so well just goes... and I remember being in a I went on a silent retreat. I might have told you about this Vic. I went a silent retreat for 10 days. I was trying that Vipassana thing. And you know, I've been working really hard on concentrating what they've told you to concentrate and the sensation by your nostrils, and, you know, so much concentration I was, it was and at one it was one day. I can't remember how many days in, and I did. I was a bit cheeky, I was really tired, and I thought, I'm not gonna pull my concentration back for I'm just gonna let my brain wander for a bit. I mean, it's like, whatever it is, 10 hours a day they're gonna fall down a brain hole. I'm just gonna not I mean, I didn't let go that long. But the thing that, the thing that I let myself think about was I could not remember the real name of fat boy slim.....And I knew I knew it. And I was like, Claire, you should be coming back to this nostril sensation. But I was like, but come on, what is the name of fat boy slim? I don't know why he came into my head. Don't know why the things that your brain pulls out when you've been just not talking to anybody for ten days... couldn't remember it. It became like a sort of cryptic challenge I'd set myself. Took me ages, and it was so weird. I was like, you know, this, this, you're, you're you. You were a teenager in the 90s. You know, this person's name couldn't age. I mean, it was, I can't even think about it. Was hours about I suddenly went ...Norman Cook!

Emma Williams 12:32

That's, that's it. I think we have everything we need.

Vic Llewellyn 12:36

Brilliant. We're going to look at where the hippocampus is.

Emma Williams 12:40

I know where the hippocampus is. You're right. I don't think it's on the front. It's not at the frontal.

I think it's where you were pointing. Because you're good. You do know things right? Let's stop because I have too much to edit.

Vic Llewellyn

I Gotta go to the off licence.

Sam Halmarack ( Singing) 12:56

FEAR!!

Vic Llewellyn 13:04

No one has listening Has been brought to you by Emma Williams and Vic Llewellyn with music and singing by Sam Halmarack. The interviewees are Saikat Ahamed, Claire Beresford and Chris Bianchi. This project has been supported by the Arts Council England and 10 Radio.