

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**GAMALIEL ARROYO:** Hey, y'all. My name is Gamaliel Arroyo from the BIPOC's Critics Lab, and I'm here talking to the director of artistic sign language Andrew Morrill and Dickie Hearts, a cast member from the Public Theater and Bushwick Star's *Dark Disabled Stories*.

So it seems like *Dark Disabled Stories* feels like this constant living, breathing play because we see different characters and different people telling their takes and their stories and their lives on stage. So with that being said, what was the process like integrating a personal queer dating story from your end, Dickie, or just seeing that happen throughout all these stories.

**DICKIE HEARTS:** I remember the first time I read the script. I was reading it, I felt like really entranced by it. I felt I could absolutely relate to each of these stories that are on the pages so far, and something about disability queer experience is also inherently deaf, too. It's not just-- every disability has their own experiences and nuances. Everyone has their own story. There's no one story for every person. That's a common misconception that everyone thinks that one person's experience is universal to everyone else in the community. But feelings, emotions, thoughts can be similar, but experiences vary.

This is a great team, and, of course, and I couldn't do it out of my dazzle who made sure that my sign language is perfect so thank you, Andrew.

**ANDREW MORRILL:** Of course, that's why I'm here.

**GAMALIEL ARROYO:** Andrew, could you tell us a little bit more about what artistic sign language involves?

**ANDREW MORRILL:** There's more creativity in the translation process, and we elevate sign language to be on the stage. So there's a lot involved in taking a script from English into artistic sign language. I mean, Dickie already is fabulous on stage, and my goal is to make him look even more fab. So I make sure that in the translations, everything is represented accurately about Ryan's experience, Dickie's experience, Alejandra's experience, and that that story is told cohesively in sign language.

And then at the same time, we have to think about all of the layers of queerness, of disability. What do we sign for Grindr? What do we sign for scruff? What do we sign for being discreet? All of those layers that are very well known in the queer community, we have to make sure that they're signed accurately so that we can expose other deaf and hearing individuals to those signs, to that vocabulary in our language.

Sign language is a part of us. It's always a part of us. And I would say that one thing that ASL does to any show is that it enhances the experience.

For example, Ryan, when he is telling his story with Dickie alongside him signing his story, certain moments become actually embodied and are visualized so people can hear Ryan tell his story and also see a visual representation of the story, so it enhances the process for everybody. Also we've had to navigate telling the story, and in doing that we have to think about access and creativity. Dickie is not just there to give access to audience members who use American Sign Language. Dickie is fully integrated into the show, and, again, his being there enhances it.

So it's not just about access, but really I should mention in terms of access, we do have open captions, Dickie signing the story, and Ryan telling his story in spoken English all woven into it. But at the same time, everything we do has to serve the story.

**DICKIE** You want to see a sign for Grindr?

**HEARTS:**

**GAMALIEL** I would love that.

**ARROYO:**

[LAUGHING]

**DICKIE** So is the sign for Grindr.

**HEARTS:**

So you're going to open one hand and then put your other hand on top and then go back and forth.

Well, it's kind of like a radius. You're looking-- zoning someone in and then catching their eye and targeting.

**ANDREW MORRILL:** Right. And so I will just add some context to this. So this hand shape is also phallic, so you can imagine what this might be and where it leads you.

**DICKIE** As I said before, each disability is different. For example, when I'm playing Ryan, I'm experiencing his story. And  
**HEARTS:** as an actor I take a step back, and I'm really-- our feelings are very mutual in the same of what happened, but our experiences are different as was stated in the play and Ryan has cerebral palsy and I'm deaf. So it's been really fascinating to explore that and see his stories and the different frameworks for my stories and just really just take everything in.

**ANDREW MORRILL:** Yeah, I feel similarly. Even the word disabled is a huge word. It's a big word and encompasses a lot of different experiences in people. In terms of Alejandra's story, I never-- I'm able-bodied. I can go up the stairs. So if the elevator is out, doesn't really impact me much. So, again, I think we're shining a spotlight on the so many different layers of disability because we're not a monolith. And so I'm really excited to see how the story is brought to life on stage and for audiences to experience it because I think they're going to come away with the thought that disability is bigger than they realize.

**DICKIE** Andrew, thank you for mentioning that physically abled portion. Ryan and Alejandra both have disabilities that  
**HEARTS:** are physically based. They're very visual. They're something that you can see. Ryan uses a walker. Alexandria uses a wheelchair-- we use the wheelchair, and I don't. I don't have a mobility device.

So when you see me walking across the street, you might be able to identify I'm gay-- but I think I'm pretty obviously gay, but you would see a BIPOC, clearly gay person on the street and just go, OK, great, cool. New York. It is what it is.

But that moment I start putting my hands up to sign or pointing to my ear, that's I can see the face that that realization that process that inkling of, oh, you're deaf. How do I communicate with them? And then all of a sudden, all the neurons are firing. You can-- I see it happening, and that's something that I see every day.

I just try to get past that part of the conversation and just move on as quickly as possible. I think this show really will rock people's expectations and really will highlight the fact that we're all not the same.

**GAMALIEL**

Awesome, guys. Well, this has been amazing so far. Thank you so much for everything.

**ARROYO:**

[MUSIC PLAYING]