

The Public Theater | Podcast Ep 3 LOW RES for transcript

[MUSIC PLAYING]

SHARON *The Harder They Come* is right on time.

GORDON:

WOMAN: *The Harder They Come* is irie.

MAN: Culture, music, and perseverance.

WOMAN: Dynamic, energetic.

MAN: *The Harder They Come* is a classic story that is being re-imagined and done in a whole new and exciting way.

WOMAN: A celebration of a story whose cultural impact has changed the world.

WOMAN: It's everything that you remember about being Jamaican.

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: OK. This episode is jam-packed, so much so that my producer John told me to stop interviewing people, concerned we wouldn't be able to fit everyone in. But this is so important, not just because we want you to come and see the show, and learn about this beloved film, musical adaptation, and the people who made it. But because here in our third full episode, this season, we get to do something spectacular.

We get to use theater to examine culture. We get to use iconic and popular music, and all of the amazing feelings of joy and warmth they inspire to think about our world, the people in it, and how we all connect to each other. We get to see clearly now, the beginnings of a bright, bright sunshiny day.

[AUDIO LOGO]

(VOICEOVER): This episode of *Public Square 2.0* includes some strong language and a bit of cussing, just a heads up.

[AUDIO LOGO]

GARLIA Hey, everybody. It's Garlia here at The Public. The Public Theater is--

CORNELIA

JONES:

BOY: Your work.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: I've got many rivers to cross, but I can't find my way home. So says the Jimmy Cliff song on the soundtrack to the 1972 film, *The Harder They Come*. Over 50 years later, Perry Henzell's groundbreaking movie is now a musical with a book by Suzan-Lori Parks, writer in residence, and our first guest from episode one of Public Square 2.0.

What's up, everybody? My name is Garlia Cornelia Jones. And for the next hour or so, we'll go on a journey and discussion around the film as a classic in 1970s Jamaica, the historical context behind it, and explore our 2023 adaptation, taking you behind the curtain, and into the process with some of the people who have made *The Harder They Come* a reality.

For those of you who have listened to our previous episodes, this next disclaimer won't come as a surprise. But just in case you haven't noticed, I'm a person who stutters. And it doesn't bother me, so don't let it bother you. Now before we dive in, please remember to like, and subscribe, and give us that five star rating you know we deserve. So as Dame Julie Andrews once said, let's start at the very beginning.

In early January of 2023, a team of actors, musicians, technicians, and designers began rehearsals for *The Harder They Come*, preparing to open up the second half of our 2022/2023 season at The Public Theater on New York's Lower East Side. Here's Justine Henzell, daughter of director and producer of *The Harder They Come*, Perry Henzell, with a bit of context as we dive in. During the first week of rehearsal, we had a dramaturgy session led by our director of new work and development, Amrita Ramanan who we will meet later on in this episode.

But to set the stage for where we are, I asked Justine to share the timeline she shared with us that day and with the cast. You can also find a very thorough, visual version of this linked in the show notes and inside of your playbill if you have already seen the show. Justine's timeline put us in place and set the stage for *The Harder They Come*.

[AUDIO LOGO]

**JUSTINE
HENZELL:**

Yeah. It was wonderful to finally be in the room. I mean, this project at The Public has been a long time coming. And like many things, it had a pandemic pause. So it was fantastic to be in the room with the company, with the cast, with the incredible creative team. And for Kwame and I to have a chance to explain to them, especially the younger people in the room, the very long history, which is culminating in them getting on that stage in February.

Younger folks see it is a way to think that everything happened in their lifetime almost. And so we just took them back a couple of hundred years and said, the story of Ivan comes out of a long history of resistance and rebellion that seems built into the DNA of Jamaica and of Jamaicans.

So I went back to the 1800s and I said, in 1838, slavery was finally abolished. The British captured Jamaica in 1655. But slavery was finally abolished in 1838. But the conditions were still bad, so there was still a lot of suffering. And so there were rebellions. So Sam Sharpe led a rebellion. And then there were more riots. Even 100 years after emancipation, there were the labor riots of 1938. And then out of that came the beginnings of our internal political parties with our two political parties being founded with universal adult suffrage happening, which meant every Jamaican could vote. So we were finally taking ownership of our political life finally. And this is over 100 years after the abolition of slavery.

And then we fast forward to 1948, which was when Reagan, who was actually the outlaw who Ivan in *The Harder They Come* is based on. He actually was in all the newspapers. He was outlaw on the run that was captivating everybody's imagination. That was 1948. In 1962, Jamaica finally got independence. And in 1972, 10 years later, the holiday premiered on the screen at the Carib Theater. So that feeling, like I said, of rebellion and resistance that Ivan has, that determination to overcome and fulfill his dreams no matter what are the costs. That is something, like I said, that's built into the Jamaican story from time immemorial.

[AUDIO LOGO]

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:

That was Justine Henzell, the daughter of director and producer Perry Henzell. Team Public Square sat down with Justine and Kwame Dawes in our virtual studios as both were back in their respective homes, following the first week of rehearsal. Kwame Dawes is a professor at the University of Nebraska, longtime collaborator of the Handel family, and cultural consultant for the production. We drop in just after Justine has shared the timeline. Justine and Kwame have known each other for over 20 years.

[AUDIO LOGO]

KWAME
DAWES:

One of the remarkable things about thinking about that timeline is that the other rebel in all of this is Perry Henzell because if you think about-- he decides to make a film on a story, which is the story of a criminal, which had taken the imagination of Jamaicans in 1948. And when you look at the newspaper articles, you realize that this is just a straight story about crime, so to speak.

And what Henzell recognized right away was first of all, the style of this criminal, which was a kind of rebel attitude, a kind of folk-- a man making his own legendary space in the moment, and the collusion, probably unwilling collusion of the media and the society to it, the fascination. And I think he was capturing a core attitude, a core understanding that exists in Jamaican society where there is a questioning of authority, which comes out of slavery. A recognition that these acts of rebellion, and even the things that we call crime are not innocently aspects of pathologies but actually, a reflection of social inequities of the repression of imagination and activity.

And Perry Henzell takes all of that and brings back Reagan into 1972, and says it's the same spirit, and the same attitude. But by doing that, he's actually doing something that goes counter to the social sort of more is in Jamaica at the time. Because what he's doing is he's elevating into a mythic figure, somebody who many of what we call proper people in society would regard as a figure that should not be remembered, should not be associated with Jamaica. And in that moment, Henzell does something radical.

But at the same time, incredibly poetic because he's understood something about a core instinct in Jamaican society that he, I think, identified. Perry Henzell had no doubt about who he was, where he came from. But he also had a clear sense of the society he lives in, and the people that he admires, and he lives among. I think there's something critically important about the way that film presents itself to the society. And the fact that it caught on so quickly and so powerfully speaks to that recognition. Yeah.

[AUDIO LOGO]

In addition to Kwame Dawes, we've also utilized three cultural ambassadors. And while they have not been as involved, they have been present during some dramaturgy sessions and rehearsals. Their input has been extremely valuable. Reactions to the film and subsequent reactions to this musical supported the whole process. And understanding what this piece means to them as Jamaicans, whether in Jamaica at the time, or here in America was incredibly important.

[AUDIO LOGO]

**SHARON
GORDON:**

The belly of it was exposed with this film. And so there were those like my parents in them who this was-- you-- like I said, it was whispered. There were areas of the hierarchy, the echelon that did not want this, did not like this, did not appreciate that he was doing this. How dare he? And then there were those in the ghettos, in the shanty towns, in the rural areas who saw themselves in this movie, who saw people they knew, people they could identify with, people who were real to them. And a story that though for some, a little mmh with the "violence", quote unquote.

But it is a violent time, you see. And it showed that. And that was not something that was embraced by the status quo. And here we speak about the stone that the builder refused, going on to becoming that head cornerstone. Here is *The Harder They Come* 50 years out. And look where we are, being re-imagined in this time, a visionary work, pioneering work by Mr. Henzell who I have much respect for.

[AUDIO LOGO]

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:**

That was Sharon Gordon, one of our cultural ambassadors. Sharon is an activist and advocate whose work is connected to her Jamaican and African roots. Let's go back to Kwame and Justine.

[AUDIO LOGO]

There are always inherent difficulties in bringing a new piece of work to the stage. And those challenges can be multiplied when it also involves introducing a culture. But a lot of people, Americans in specific might feel as though we already know Jamaica since we take vacations there, cruises.

A lot of people have seen *Cool Runnings*, the film. And everyone knows the lyrics to *No Woman, No Cry*. But these are largely the stereotypes that can exist without context. So I'm wondering if both of you can speak for a moment about the difficulties in presenting the nuances of a culture to an audience that might already think they have the necessary information.

**JUSTINE
HENZELL:**

Do you probably want to take that one?

**KWAME
DAWES:**

Yeah. I would say that I think you're absolutely spot on about that. But here's the thing, there's a difference between, say, the film *The Harder They Come* out in 1972 and *The Harder They Come*, the musical happening now. The context has changed because of *The Harder They Come* in '72, for instance.

And then what follows? What follows is the explosion of reggae music globally. And reggae music really enters the global market in a unique way for international music styles to enter into, say, the American culture or the British culture. It really enters it on its own terms, a kind of defiant belief in the articulation of the experience. Because Jamaican music's development in Jamaica was so well advanced and so thorough that a Jamaican artist could feel just as happy, well, not just as happy but could actually have a whole career inside of Jamaica that was complex and incredible.

And then when it's transported to the world, something has happened. So consequently, we go through reggae. We go through dancehall. And so when we come to *The Harder They Come*, the musical, I think stereotypes still exist. But there is an access to Jamaican culture that is the Jamaican culture that presents itself defiantly and quite aggressively. And I would say that's in the music for the most part.

I love *Cool Runnings*, and my kids love it. We all love watching it. It's funny and so on. But I think even-- I think there are a lot of Americans who do not confuse, say-- cannot use the same metrics to understand *Cool Runnings* as they would to understand Shabba Ranks, or Buju Banton, and so on because they're very different metrics. And I think people have that sophistication.

So the challenge, I think, for the play is, how do you make a Broadway show on something that has a very cohesive, and coherent, real space that it has? And then how do you take advantage of the rich culture, the rich elements of that culture that many people are not familiar with but that would translate beautifully on stage in wonderful ways? And I think that's one of the challenges, and I think one of the opportunities that present themselves to those who are producing it.

And what Suzan-Lori Parks effectively does is she, I think, she's committed to the idea that how do I tell the same story like Perry told a 1948 story in 1972? How do I tell a 1972, '73 story in 2022 while retaining a kind of element, the spirit of it, and yet sort of retelling it in a new space, in a new genre, a new form, and so on? And I think what she's done by taking that music and moving it into this fairly and this really narrative structure where the songs move the story forward is brilliant, not nothing short of brilliant. And I think audiences are going to just look at it and go, I see what you did there. That's really cool. A lot of that is going to happen.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:**

Absolutely.

[AUDIO LOGO]

How do you tell a story from 1972 in 2023 while retaining its spirit? As Kwame said, it's a retelling, and in a new form, and new genre. Let's catch up with Kenny Seymour, music supervisor, orchestrator, and arranger for *The Harder They Come*. When we drop in, we're reflecting on the electricity of that first day, that first week of rehearsal.

[AUDIO LOGO]

And we have that Jamaican flag. I think something that people don't know to really paint that picture of the space is in the rehearsal room that first day, there is a Jamaican flag. And there's maps. I believe that there's maps that Tony has up on the wall. And so that I know for me, coming in that room was like, we are in this space. And you're right. I think the music of Jamaica is not something that you hear often. And it's not something that is portrayed in musicals.

But this isn't your first time working with reggae, the Jamaican music. You worked on Marley at Baltimore Center Stage, right? And so--

**KENNY
SEYMOUR:**

Yeah. I worked with Marley. I worked on Marley, its first incarnation at Center Stage. And that was wonderful. And the beauty about the whole Jamaican culture music is there are so many different facets to Jamaican music. There's rocksteady. There's ska. Then there's reggae, which we all know the name. And there's so many different types of feels.

And I think that was one of the things I love about *The Harder They Come* is because not only are we just dealing with traditional reggae, but we're also dealing with ska. We're dealing with rocksteady, really different types of feels. A lot of the music that's in the musical is reflected from the soundtrack. So you have The Slickers, The Melodians. You have Desmond Dekker and of course, Jimmy Cliff. So yeah, it's wonderful.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:**

And we also have some of Suzan-Lori Parks. She wrote some three new songs, I believe, in the show.

**KENNY
SEYMOUR:**

Three new songs. And if I-- I'm not even sure whether I'm allowed to say it.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:**

Yeah.

**KENNY
SEYMOUR:**

They're really good. She's a very talented writer. And it fits right within. It's not like sometimes when you would write a song for a genre specific show. And then you say, OK, this song is written, and it's not part of the original body of work. But the way that she composed the song--

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:**

They sound--

**KENNY
SEYMOUR:**

They sound-- it's seamless. So it was very impressive. And it goes well with the show.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:**

I sat in on that. I think, it was that first music rehearsal with everyone, the second day. And I just was like, I'm just going to sit here. And I was just really excited. And I remember, I was talking to our producer, John. And I was like, this music is amazing. And I think, if you know reggae music to be in a space, and then to also love the theater, and to have the two in the same space is really special. And I don't even know if I can really put a full word. I just really want people to hear it and to feel it. And there's such a warmth in this space of the actors and the company. They have such a good time together. And they have such a good-- such a great rapport, which I think is really-- which really carries through. How has that been for you?

**KENNY
SEYMOUR:**

I agree. I agree. The vibe in the room is very-- there's a unified feel in the room. I think it starts from the top. So first, the space is phenomenal. The space at The Public, those rehearsal spaces are incredible. I remember the first time I actually went in one. And I was like, oh, this is--

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:**

We did always have those.

KENNY I know. So I went in there. I was like, really, OK. And just the vibe, just the energy from everybody in general,
SEYMOUR: management. And when I say it comes from the top, Tony and Sergio have set a tone. So it's like the vibe in the room. Then it goes down to-- my department is music supervision and dance choreography. Everybody is really here for the music. And it shows. So it starts-- the vibe starts from the top. And then plus we have such a stellar company that they're here for it. They're here for it.

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: Well, what did you know about *The Harder They Come* before you started working on it?

KENNY
SEYMOUR: Well, I mean, the original film was released in, I believe, 1972. So I didn't really watch it until about mid '80s because--

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: It's something that I think in that first rehearsal, a lot of people talked about, which was really moving in that there was a dramaturgy session as well and people talking about their first impact and what the film meant to them as children. And so it's always interesting to connect with people to see what their impressions were of that story.

KENNY
SEYMOUR: I mean, it was a different world. I had family members who were from Jamaica. And so I had that culture around me.

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: Around you, yeah.

KENNY
SEYMOUR: But this was deep. This was like back. And I think the first time I actually went to Jamaica, I was working with a group called [? Janae. ?] So I went to Kingston. I went to Ocho Rios. But it wasn't what was indicated in the film. So I had some friends who lived out, so I went offsite from the hotel. And then I saw a part of that. But the movie was-- at that time, it had such a huge following. They had midnight showings of it, and they had-- it came like almost a classic.

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: It was huge.

KENNY
SEYMOUR: So that was my first. And my first introduction to it was in the mid-late '80s.

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: So when you were approached for this project, was there a way that you looked at approaching the work that was different than what you had done before?

KENNY
SEYMOUR: It's interesting because with *The Harder They Come* or with any genre specific music per se, even with my-- the show that I'm working on now and that I'm-- *Ain't Too Proud*. Every different genre of music be it rock, jazz, swing, theater. They have their own methodology. They have their own characteristics that make them what they are. And I think as far as reggae is concerned or Jamaican music in general, there's a method to the madness.

And I think that in capturing that, that was my primary focus because I'm the music supervisor and the orchestrator arranger for the show. So from a music supervisor perspective, it's more of maintaining the integrity of the music so that you hear it, and you know what it is. From an orchestrator perspective, it is reggae, ska, R&B. They all have little things that make them work. I think of them as an engine. They all have moving parts. And they all have-- in reggae, traditional reggae, the bass is doing its thing. It has its lane. You have the guitar that has this chick-it, chick-it. Right?

GARLIA Yeah.

**CORNELIA
JONES:**

**KENNY
SEYMOUR:** That's what it does. The drums, a lot of times they give you the one drops, tit-dum, tit. That's what it does. So when they all work together, then you have this kind of cohesive-like unit. And I think that is the important thing about maintaining the integrity of what that musical style is. It could be the same thing with salsa. It's the same thing with rock. They all have characteristics.

So in approaching this, *The Harder They Come*, it was more finding out, what is it that makes that song what it is? Keeping that and then being able to use that to help move the narrative forward with what the director and the book writer wants, when we have underscoring how to maintain that feel, and keep that going. So when we go back into song it doesn't feel disjointed. So the approach was primarily to maintain the musical integrity of the style of music, if that makes sense.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:** Yeah. No. It makes sense. And I feel like that's what I was at least, bonding to when I sat there, just sort of taking it in. Because I think we've talked about it and not being something that we see in a theatrical setting. And so how do the two combine and how do the two work to get together? And I had to ask, which show-- which songs were Suzan-Lori's and which songs were not. And so I had sort of-- because I knew that they were the-- I knew the three. They were [*? Him, ?*] *Hero Don't Die*, and *The Ballad of Ivan*.

And so I was like, wow. I'm just very excited. And I was hoping-- I think we wanted to have music played and to really think about it. And she was here on our first podcast and played, not those songs but other songs of hers. And so it's also interesting just to see that. I mean, music has been something that she's really been doing.

**KENNY
SEYMOUR:** Just guitar playing, she plays too.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:** Yeah. No, no, no. She really gets in there.

**KENNY
SEYMOUR:** I could tell you one thing, this sitzprobe-- for those who don't know, the sitzprobe--

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:** Yes, please, explain to people who do not know what a sitzprobe is.

KENNY
SEYMOUR: A sitz probe is-- well, let's say you have a brand new musical. Somebody writes all the music then you give it to the orchestrator. The orchestrator, he takes that song. It could be on a piano with a recording of the voice. And he writes it out for however many instruments that they have in the orchestra so bass drums, keyboards, guitar, strings, brass, all that. The sitzprobe, after everything is orchestrated and rehearsed, it's the first time that the cast who's been listening to nothing but a piano and a drum in the room for the past month and a half get to feel and hear the whole orchestra of their show. So in this case, it's going to be a party. When they start and they start pa-ra-ka-ka-ka-dum-ka-ka. It's like I'm excited myself.

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: It's going to be a party.

KENNY
SEYMOUR: I sit back, and I'm writing the orchestrations. And I'm just sitting here just grooving. I'm just having a good time. And that's one of the beautiful things about this style of music. It's infectious. It gets in here.

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: It is.

KENNY
SEYMOUR: When you hear it, you can't just help it. You just go. It starts off with your head. And then your shoulders start getting into it.

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: You just start moving. Yeah. Oh my gosh.

KENNY
SEYMOUR: But that's a sitzprobe.

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: Yes.

[AUDIO LOGO]

We've touched on the history and music so far. And when we come back, we'll take a look at the dramaturgy, and the role it plays in bringing this new work to the stage. But first, here's a little bit from some of the other lead creatives about *The Harder They Come*.

[AUDIO LOGO]

EDGAR
GODINEAUX: *The Harder They Come* is--

SUZAN-LORI
PARKS: And *The Harder They Come* is-- I don't know. I go with those one-line things, girl.

EDGAR Joy, rude boys in effect.

GODINEAUX:

TONY *The Harder They Come* is a play about how to live in a world where the odds are stacked against you.

TACCONI:

EDGAR Just groovy. I mean, it's in the pocket. We got Kenny Seymour hitting us with a lot of grooves. So it's got a good groove.

GODINEAUX:

SUZAN-LORI It's a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful show.

PARKS:

EDGAR I mean, if you come away with anything, you'll have a really good story. And that music is going to be fire. So we've got to bring the moves.

GODINEAUX:

SUZAN-LORI I mean, it's just to hear the music and to see Ivan's story.

PARKS:

TONY And how to find the life force to overcome those obstacles.

TACCONI:

SUZAN-LORI *The Harder They Come*--

PARKS:

EDGAR *The Harder They Come*--

GODINEAUX:

TONY *The Harder They Come* is a--

TACCONI:

SUZAN-LORI --is a great, fucking show. Can we say that?

PARKS:

[AUDIO LOGO]

GARLIA What do dramaturgs and chiropractors have in common? Well, in our next segment, we sit down with Amrita who came to The Public over the summer as our director of new work and development. If you are watching the video version of the podcast, you're going to notice some big smile. And for all of you listening, you will probably be able to hear them too.

CORNELIA

JONES:

Amrita is also the dramaturg for *The Harder They Come*. My favorite thing about the way Amrita describes her work is that she frames herself as a chiropractor that really shapes the spine of a play. Let's put a drop in there.

[AUDIO LOGO]

I love what you said about the spine of the play and being a chiropractor for the play. And I'm just thinking about all the play development I've been a part of, either as a producer, or a playwright. And just how incredibly valuable it is to have someone who is literally thinking about the words that you are saying. Somebody that has our back. And so I feel like that seems to be the essence of the work that you do.

And in thinking about your role on *The Harder They Come*, I'm first think thinking about the first time that you encountered that film and that story. Was it prior to being at The Public? Was this a piece of art that you knew before you came here? Or was your interaction with *The Harder They Come*, was that first time with this production?

**AMRITA
RAMANAN:**

I was familiar with the film. I'm very fortunate to come from a large pluralistic family and remember many, many conversations and celebrations about the 1972 film from them as well as also other loved ones in my community. But I will admit I never actually watched it all the way through until the piece was introduced to me through this amazing new musical adaptation by Suzan-Lori Parks.

And so my first encounter with it was last fall, fall of 2022. I joined The Public over the summer. And then during the fall, I met with Tony Taccone, one of the directors of our production. And he talked to me pretty extensively about the journey that he had had with the film and the work that Suzan-Lori Parks is doing to bring it to life in the state as a stage adaptation. So I watched it several times. I realized in the process of watching it that I was actually very familiar with the soundtrack without knowing it. So the soundtrack had actually been a soundtrack that I grew up with and had not, as a child, associated that with the soundtrack of the film. So that was a beautiful discovery in watching it.

And I'm very moved by how this film has truly created such a cultural revolution in terms of what it meant for a Jamaican director, Perry Henzell, a Jamaican screenwriter with a full Jamaican cast, with the lead of Jimmy Cliff to be out in the world. To actually be a film that-- I have family who was living in India at the time. And they remember it. And so it's quite moving to me to think of the journey of this film and also to recognize that we are now just past the 50th anniversary and how the stage adaptation is truly, I think, in celebration of that.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:**

So it sounds like music was actually a big part of your life growing up and even as an adult. And you mentioned watching the film for the first time and realizing that you knew the music, which is actually the same. I have that same reaction hearing the film and going, I know all these songs, right?

And so I didn't know them from my childhood, but I did know them from my adulthood and just had not made the connection. So I'm curious if you can talk a bit about how the-- I'm curious if you can talk a bit about how the soundtrack impacts you as an artist and what you think of how the music is taking shape now in this adaptation because we've talked a little-- we've talked about in our other interviews just about how this is an adaptation of the film. And so, just curious if you can shed a little bit of light there for us.

**AMRITA
RAMANAN:**

Music is a huge influence for me. I-- both in the space that I really love music. I find it to be something that I've responded to. And then also as a child, I grew up watching many, many Bollywood films where music is always an element of inclusion. And often, some of those songs live beyond the film.

So, that's a big part of my childhood and my adulthood as well as my mother loved musicals. So, between Bollywood and also musicals such as "Fiddler on the Roof" or "Sound of Music," I remember having so many memories of watching movie musicals with my mother and then eventually going to see musicals on stage. So for me-- and actually, another thing I'll add is I as a child trained in Bharatanatyam dance. That is a style of dance drama that also has a very strong connection and incorporation of music. So to me, so much of my rearing in the performing arts was always holding music as a necessary element.

GARLIA Yeah.

CORNELIA

JONES:

AMRITA And I really love in thinking about "The Harder They Come" is the film itself is not a musical, per se. It's not a
RAMANAN: musical film, but music is truly such a strong narrative undercurrent of that film. So to me, it makes such perfect sense that the stage adaptation should be a musical.

I do think that music is a star-- is a star of this. As our wonderful cultural consultant for "The Harder They Come" Kwame Dawes will say, the music is nice. Like, the music is really [INAUDIBLE]. And what I think is so great about Suzan-Lori Parks' approach to building "The Harder They Come" on stage as a musical is I think that she's been really, really effective in finding which songs within the soundtrack and the Jimmy Cliff songbook really fuel the story forward, really help us understand the world, give us the sense of, you know, joy, nostalgia when we hear some of these songs again.

GARLIA Absolutely.

CORNELIA

JONES:

AMRITA --such as even when I heard the lyrics again I can see clearly now, the rain is gone, it just gave me such a shiver.

RAMANAN:

GARLIA Yeah.

CORNELIA

JONES:

AMRITA And she's also written some original songs for the musical. So the audience will get such a treat in being able to
RAMANAN: engage with these three important containers-- you know, the soundtrack of "The Harder They Come," the Jimmy Cliff songbook, and original music by Suzan-Lori Parks. So, I'm thrilled about the musical element of this, and as a dramaturg, it's been very exciting to really familiarize myself with kind of the generational expansiveness of reggae. And you know, Kwame, who I mentioned before, has deep scholarship in reggae, has created a song list for the company of reggae songs and reggae DJs that go from the 19, you know, '60s, '70s, all through today. I think that is such an essential element, and it has been joyful, joyful, to experience it and work with it.

GARLIA It is a very exciting playlist. I am-- as soon as you shared that list from Kwame, I turned it into-- I pulled all the
CORNELIA songs so that I could have it playing on repeat. So it has been a really exciting component to this production just
JONES: to have those songs as part of our experience with the show too. I'm thinking about your role as a dramaturg on this production and thinking about, you know, you were working on its spine, right?

And this is also a production that's had a life, as you said. You know, Tony Taccone and SLP have been working on this, and it did precede your time at The Public too. So, how did you and how do you continue to approach working on a piece that was already in development but is still-- was still in a process and, you know, needed some-- I don't know. I forget what the chiropractors do, but it needed some work or some support, right?

AMRITA

RAMANAN:

Yes, yes. It's such a great question, and it does make me think very, very expansively about the role of dramaturg because in my experience as a dramaturg, I've often entered processes at a variety of stages, sometimes from the really, you know, nascent shape of an idea with the playwright, sometimes with, say, a production of Shakespeare where the play was written 400 plus years ago, and we are responsible for the adaptation, and sometimes such as this one, where it is a new and contemporary musical adaptation but one that, as you so beautifully put, *Garlia*, has had its journey, has had its developmental journey, both between, you know, Suzan-Lori Parks and our associate artistic director Mandy Hackett and director Tony Taccone. So when I entered, I felt like there were several key responsibilities that I held, one of which was to be a fresh set of ears and eyes in thinking about how does the film of the early 1970s translate to the theater of 2023 and really looking at the bridge of time and the bridge of storytelling in those worlds that is supportive.

This is actually an exercise that I've learned to often do when I'm working as a dramaturg on Shakespeare where you have to find the harmony of multiple time periods. You have to look at the time period of when the play was written, when it was performed, if that might be a different time, when it is being performed today in front of our audience, and whatever time period it might be set in. So with "*The Harder They Come*," we clearly have a story that is set in the original time period of the film.

But that is being presented today. So I truly was interested in the navigation of how that story lives and breathes. And in addition to that, something that I think we've really been finding effectively as a creative team and with our amazing company-- my gosh, these actors are so incredible-- is how do you find a place of reverence for the film that really honors the story while also allowing the stage adaptation to live and breathe with the audience members who may not have experienced the film, and this is their first time experiencing the story.

So that has been a great exercise for all of us to undertake, and I deeply applaud the kind of genius of Suzan-Lori Parks because I think she's truly found a way to carry this story with deep honor and care while also making some beautiful choices from her perspective and sensibility that I do think activate it for the stage, activate it theatrically, in a way that's deeply exciting and also provide, you know, more agency for the women of the world who were originally not, you know, included as fully in the film to provide more construction around Ivan's arc and his desires and what is his journey from being a hopeful dreamer to an outlaw. So I really think that that has been the main, you know, shaping of the spine, the main chiropractory-- I don't even know how to say the word but the main job of the script chiropractor.

And then I think the other component that's been huge in my dramaturgy for this is the research. You know, Tony-- Tony very openly shared with me, which I appreciated, that coming into the world of it, we wanted to be really sensitive to how we are uplifting the recreation of 1972 Jamaica on stage while also saying we will never exactly know what it means to feel 1972 Jamaica in our bodies for, you know, almost the entire cast, many of whom are really fantastic artists in their 20s or early 30s. So what, you know, Kwame and I put together was some pretty extensive research that really looked at the world, looked at specific thematic elements of the play, looked at image because image, I think, can be a really helpful entry point to one's dramaturgical journey, music, as you and I had talked about before, and also visual maps and other-- just other elements that we can really fuel the world with. So we put together, thanks to our helpful stage management team, a research table that contains a number of hard copy materials, a number of books, and we also created a virtual research packet as well that we continue to build on too per request from the company.

GARLIA Another person who joined or rejoined, in this case, the Public Theater family over the summer was Freedom
CORNELIA Bradley-Ballentine. But this is not Freedom's first time at The Public. He was here years ago and early on in his
JONES: career under the artistic direction of George C. Wolfe.

FREEDOME When I saw that we were doing, you know, "The Harder They Come, the Harder They Fall," I was really excited
BRADLEY- about it because I saw "The Harder They Come" in 1980. You know, like, I saw it as, you know, like as a kid--
BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Yeah.
CORNELIA
JONES:

FREEDOME --at the less than dollar movie theater--
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:

GARLIA And can you talk about that experience? Because that was that first day of rehearsal and that dramaturgy
CORNELIA session that we had, and everyone was sharing. There were so many people sharing about that first day.
JONES:

FREEDOME Well, no. I'll even go back before then.
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:

GARLIA OK.
CORNELIA
JONES:

FREEDOME You know, like, just the day that they had workshops of the piece itself, you know, like to see where we were with
BRADLEY- it-- you know, like, have it read out loud, do some of the choreo, do some of the movement, you know, like, not
BALLENTINE: just to see, OK, this is when people would move on. How would they move on, how would they move off? You
know, like, it was just seeing that, seeing how beautifully they had done that, the work that Sergio and Tony and
Suzan-Lori Parks had done, you know, like, to really update-- because it's a gnarly story. You know, like, when
you look at it from the '80s, you know, like-- I mean, from the '70s, it was the things that resonated in there can
look a lot-- looking at it in today's scope, times have changed. And updating it and making it relevant, making it
relevant and palatable into today's-- for today's audience as well as remaining true to it has been remarkable.

GARLIA Yeah.
CORNELIA
JONES:

FREEDOME You know? So when I first saw that, I was just really blown away with it. And having someone, you know, like of
BRADLEY- Tony Taccone's skill level and Sergio's skill level and Edgar's, you know, who's doing the choreography--
BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Edgar.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME --in this, you know, like, it is just-- it's amazing to see this. You know, like, taking this movie, this rough, tough,
BRADLEY- you know, gangster, you know, Bonnie and Clyde, you know, like, Billy the Kid type movie and making it into
BALLENTINE: something that resonates with today's theatergoers, you know, and doesn't, you know, back away from its, you know, Jamaicanness-- you know, like, it doesn't water it down. It just finds ways to talk about it in a language that people will understand today and in a story that people will feel that they're being brought into.

I think that is just wonderful. You know, like, to have ambassadors from the community that have come in and talk to us about this piece and how it's resonated with them has been remarkable. And that's something that's different at the Public Theater, and that's something like, you know, like, that is a success that we have. That is something that is--

GARLIA That came out of our cultural transformation.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME That came out of that-- exactly, exactly. And that's what I was getting around to, Garlia. So, that's when I talk
BRADLEY- about, like, the successes that we've had as an organization and the successes that you have had as being a part
BALLENTINE: of this. You know, like, there's no greener grass anywhere. You know, like--

GARLIA Right.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME --you're not going to go to another theater company and be like, all right, they're so much better.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA No.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME Do the work where you are and see how that bears fruit. And what you've done has been able to-- it allows us to
BRADLEY- see that this is the food that we have-- that is borne out. And I know that when we would talk to some of the
BALLENTINE: community members, they were surprised that we brought them in to the conversation.

GARLIA Absolutely.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME You know, they were really-- they were--

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Yes, because to that point, it's not something that people actually do.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME No.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA People talk about it. They say, oh, great. Nice to hear your story.

CORNELIA

JONES:

You wrote a note to us. Great. Let's move on.

FREEDOME If that.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Not--

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME If that.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA If that, if that.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME If that.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Maybe I'm being too optimistic. But not, hey, come be part of us--

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME Yeah.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA --our process.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME Yeah, yeah, yes. Yes.

**BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:**

GARLIA Yeah.

**CORNELIA
JONES:**

FREEDOME So, you know, like, just-- so, I've been seeing what's in that room, seeing the talent that's there. You know, and that's something that the Public Theater can do. You know, like, we can get some really talented people--

**BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:**

GARLIA Yes.

**CORNELIA
JONES:**

FREEDOME --and bring them into a space. And you're like, God, who's this person that's going to be playing, you know, like, Ivan? Who's this guy that's going to step into the role that Jimmy Cliff, you know created? Like, this role-- did Jimmy Cliff create the role, or did the role create Jimmy Cliff?

GARLIA Right.

**CORNELIA
JONES:**

FREEDOME You know, like, that's the thing about the play-- you know, about the movie. And then, like, it was the music. It was everything.

**BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:**

It captured the spirit. And who's going to be the person that comes in? Woo! The person that we have that's coming in is incredible.

GARLIA Is incredible.

**CORNELIA
JONES:**

FREEDOME You know, incredible. Like, to be able to have the humbleness, the humanity, as well as that change that that character has to have, you know, like, when some of that is stripped away from them, and what is the cost of that and how does that look-- you know, it's a tough-- it's a tough piece to do.

GARLIA Yeah.

**CORNELIA
JONES:**

FREEDOME You know, like, to have the tenderness as well as the roughness--

**BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:**

GARLIA Mhm.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME --once all of that stuff gets stripped away. And we have a really dynamite cast that are doing justice to the story--

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA They are.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME --justice to the songs, and justice to the new songs that are going to be coming in.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA The new songs.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME The movie breathed new life into this story, all right?

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Right.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME We're doing the same thing right now-- taking that story, taking that, you know, that piece of culture, and looking

BRADLEY- at it again through fresh eyes for another generation.

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA That's right.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME And I hope that people love it as much as I do. Because right now, I'm really proud of it.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA No, I have been super excited this entire week for every interview because there is a very specific energy around

CORNELIA this piece. There's been a very specific energy in the rehearsal room. Any time I've heard the music-- we were so

JONES: excited to have Kenny Seymour on earlier.

FREEDOME Yeah.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA And so to all the people that have put so much into to this, right, into thinking about the music and the
CORNELIA instruments and just being really specific and honoring the Jamaican sound, right? We're really paying attention
JONES: to the sound, and the whole thing put together is just--

FREEDOME Yeah.
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:

GARLIA --it's exciting to hear. And to hear the stories about how it all came together is really something special that I
CORNELIA really want people to get from--
JONES:

FREEDOME The music is nice.
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Just-- the music is-- yes, it is. It is. It is really good. Yeah, I know you're-- I sat in-- I think after the first week, I was
CORNELIA in rehearsals almost every day.
JONES:

FREEDOME You were there.
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:

GARLIA I was there every day.
CORNELIA
JONES:

FREEDOME You were there every day?
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:

GARLIA I was there every day. I didn't-- I took a week off because I knew this week, we'd be doing podcasts every day.
CORNELIA
JONES:

FREEDOME Yes.
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:

GARLIA I was like, ah, my children need to see me.
CORNELIA
JONES:

FREEDOME Yes.
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:

GARLIA They're like, where are you? They actually said, we haven't seen you almost all month. You're always at work
CORNELIA now. I was like, I was putting together a very special episode.

JONES:

FREEDOME The music is so wonderful. The dance is so wonderful. You know, like, the performances are great.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

The set is going to be incredible, you know? Like, the costumes-- everything is just coming together in a way that is, you know, that's magical because you're seeing it all created at the same time, you know? And that's the exciting thing about theater, you know?

Like, you see-- you see-- like, I walk in every day, and I walk through the Newman. I just speak my head in, and I see what they're making and how they're making, how it's coming along. You know, I had a couple of days off that I didn't come in, and I stuck my head in.

And I saw, and I was like, wow, this looks incredible, you know? So just-- it's a magical-- it's a magical experience. And like I said, I think people are really going to love this--

GARLIA Yeah, they really are.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME Because also, I mean, like, I don't know how many-- I can't name a play that is really-- that really speaks to a
BRADLEY- Jamaican experience.

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Yeah, no. Absolutely. And I think that is a thread in something that we've talked about a lot is that this play is
CORNELIA putting forth a Jamaican experience. And so for a Jamaican and Caribbean audience, this will be them seeing
JONES: themselves on stage.

FREEDOME Yeah.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA And that does not happen often in--

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME And with the specificity to it.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Right, with the specificity and in musical theater in a way that feels like we are telling this story.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME Yeah.

**BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:**

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:** These are the people. We are telling the story. It's not-- and it's told from a really-- a space that's like right here, right, and then adapted from the work of Perry Henzell's film, right? And so this being an adaptation and moving it into 2023 is something that I really do think will speak to people.

**FREEDOME
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:** It's also just so, you know-- like, I mean, Jamaican culture has been such a part of New York City culture.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:** Yeah, that's right.

**FREEDOME
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:** You know, like, since I was a kid at least, you know? Like, and probably well before that. Like, and to not have, like, a celebration of that Jamaicanness, you know, like, is kind of, you know, like-- it's, you know, New York. America is such an assimilationist place, you know, place that people just kind of blend into the cultural fabric of it or have to blend into the cultural fabric of it to be successful.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:** Right.

**SANDRA
DALEY-SHARIF:** My first impressions of "The Harder They Come--" I mean, Jimmy Cliff was all over-- you know, was on the radio. It was what my parents played in the house. It was what you heard on the airwaves, you know?

But my first impressions were really, because I was young, was really from my parents. And that was a rough movie. You know, they had Rastas, and they had young people doing things that were not Christian.

So, my parents had a very-- I-- with-- yeah, they had a very negative impression. Of course, that's them being older people, but it was a movie which I understood which really caused a sensation, definitely in Jamaica and worldwide, right? It was the first time we had a movie like that where we were represented in true color and form and the music being amazing. You know what I mean? So, yes, that was my real first impression.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:** Yeah, and what image do you think that Americans, most Americans, have of Jamaican culture?

**SANDRA
DALEY-SHARIF:** Well, Jamaicans are hardworking people, and I think that has followed us. you know, if you've heard the term Jamaicans have seven jobs-- you know what I mean? They are hard working people.

They-- in many ways, they're the backbone of this country in some ways. It's like, you know, you see them as caretakers in many homes, right? And so they're nurses in hospitals, and they are hard working people.

In many communities, you find that they are people who are-- they're a family group. You know, they are the ones who take care of their neighborhoods and take care of their homes. They tend not to take this life here in the US for granted because they know where they come from.

You know, I grew up with my mother packing barrels of food and supplies that she had to send home. That's what everybody did. They packed up, and they sent things home.

And like many immigrants, that's what we did. We slept on somebody's couch or slept in an extra room until we made our way, you know? And yeah, and Jamaicans have made their way.

You go to Brooklyn in New York, there is a community that is Jamaicans. You go anywhere on the globe, you find a pack of Jamaicans. You know what I mean?

And so they're a prideful people. And I'm excited for this to be coming to New York because I think-- I mean, these are stories that I've yearned for that I have not seen a place in the city to really celebrate this culture of people who've been here for quite a while. And yeah, I'm excited to have this story be told.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:**

That was another one of our cultural ambassadors, Sandra Daley-Sharif, talking about her experience of the film in 1970s Jamaica. It was a question the team and I had in our minds as we went into this episode. It was vital for us to hear from people who lived it either themselves or through their Jamaican family, people like Malika Lee Whitney, another cultural ambassador, or Camille Darby, a Jamaican-American playwright and VP of brand marketing at Conde Nast.

**CAMILLE
DARBY:**

I do believe I was a bit more mature at the time when the film was released. And because of the nature of it being so popular, you know, it was just a feel good moment many times to see something so openly received and to have some aspect of the social political things that happened in the country and be represented in the way, especially in the music industry, which, in many cases, have been tremendous. Not-- I want to say that-- inequities. I think that's a better word for it, you know, to see such aspirations initially be the *raison d'être* but turning into something else that is also a popular form of presentation and excitement.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:**

And that is how has Jamaican culture influenced global pop culture, music, food, and do you feel as though that culture has been well-represented in theater and film?

WOMAN:

So, you know, when I think of how Jamaica has sort of, like, influenced, you know, globally or has a global influence, I think about Garveyism and the pan-African movement as it's tied to the Civil rights movement. I think about Rastafarianism and all of the sort of elements that are infused in different ways that people live their lives, whether that's spiritually or just elements that they sort of feel makes sense for their lifestyle. I think about music.

I think about hip hop. I think about, you know, how that all started, who were the sort of pioneers of the culture when it comes on to hip hop music, and I think there was a DJ. I think it was Kool Herc, who was Jamaican.

And you know, when he was DJing in the Bronx back in the '80s, like, some of his influences came from reggae music and ska and all that stuff. So I think that influence is there. I think food-- you know, one of the things that I find to be so interesting living in a metropolitan-- I live in New York City.

And whenever I travel to other cities, other metropolitans-- none quite like New York because, like, there is none-- one of the things I noticed about some of the food and, like, restaurants I see is, like, you'll see a Mexican restaurant. You'll see a Thai restaurant. You'll see a Chinese restaurant.

You'll see all kinds of foods from different cultures in all parts of the globe. But you don't really see food from other West Indian countries besides Jamaica. And I think that's so interesting.

Like, you maybe see a [INAUDIBLE] shop. You might see like a roti shop somewhere. Like, that's probably, like, as far as it goes.

GARLIA That's-- yeah.

**CORNELIA
JONES:**

WOMAN: But for the most part, when there is a West Indian, you know, cuisine that's in a restaurant or a food truck, it's 9 times out of 10 a Jamaican restaurant. And I think that's impactful, and I've seen that outside of the US as well. So I think in terms of influence, those sort of things, I think, resonate the most.

The way we talk, our dialect, I think you sort of hear some parts of it, some moments of it in pop culture. I think people like Drake, you know, infuses it in his music when he sort of was in his, like, era of, like, really sort of working with, you know, certain sounds that were, you know, home to dance hall and reggae. But in terms of film and theater, I mean, represented well, I think, is an interesting question.

I would more so ask the question or think about the question from the perspective of is it represented often. And to that, I would say no. If there were to be more stories that centered the experience of West Indian people, of Jamaican people, more often, than I think it would sort of be just like, you know, we have options. But when you have a few, particularly in theater, it's sort of hard to answer if it was represented well or not because, you know, there's a part of you that feels just this gratitude that it's even there.

GARLIA Now back to my conversation with Freedom Bradley Valentine.

**CORNELIA
JONES:**

**FREEDOME
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:** It's incredible to see this piece, and I'm proud that the Public Theater is the place where it's happening.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:** Yes, same. I want to go back to something you said when you were talking about really wanting to be part of this artistic process for "The Harder They Come." I'm wondering if we can unpack just a little bit. You know, thinking about when you said sometimes, these plays go really-- sometimes these plays go really bad. And so just so we're on the same page and just thinking about even where our industry is and where it goes, when you say something is going really bad, what are you really thinking about?

**FREEDOME
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:** I mean, some-- you know, you think of things that aren't-- you know, that don't have a care, you know, like-- or that people aren't really being represented within the story which they're telling, you know? And I-- and--

GARLIA Right.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME It's just really telling a story with real care. You know, like, I think that that's what-- I don't think that that's--
BRADLEY- that's what's happening.

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA That's what's happening.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME You know, that's what's happening. Let's not, like, be vacillating in this, you know? Like, it's being told with real
BRADLEY- care.

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Real care.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME You know, like, we have people that are working on it that have taken-- you know, that are experts that have
BRADLEY- dedicated their whole lives.

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Kwame Dawes.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME Kwame Dawes. You know, like, they've dedicated their lives to this story, to the culture, and making sure that it is
BRADLEY- done in a way that they can walk down the street and hold their head up high--

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Right.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME --you know, with a level of integrity, you know? And I would say that with all of the creative team. You know,
BRADLEY- they've really taken care of this story, and I'm proud of that, you know? And it's something that I wanted to be--
BALLENTINE: that I wanted to be a part of when I walked in. I was like, hey, can I be a part of this too?

GARLIA That's great.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME You know, because I remember-- like I said, I remember saying this when I was a kid--

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Yeah.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME --and the impact that it had on me, you know? Like, and seeing those people on stage, you know, I mean, on the
BRADLEY- movie screen, you know, with those accents, I remember-- you know, like, I was like, oh yeah, this is like some of
BALLENTINE: the people in my neighborhood.

GARLIA Right.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME You know?

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Right.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME But you know, like, not in a way that I had ever, you know, experienced because it was like the whole thing. It
BRADLEY- wasn't like, you know--

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA It wasn't just a little--

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME It wasn't just like a few people. You know, it was like, oh, there's a whole big place where everybody's talking like
BRADLEY- this, you know? Like-- but you know, like, as a seven-year-old or an eight-year-old-- well, however, I how old I was
BALLENTINE: when I had seen it-- you know, like, it was still, like, you know, a mind blowing thing.

GARLIA And the subtitles-- how were you impacted at that age?

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME I don't even remember there being subtitles in it.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA OK.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME I don't remember that. I don't know. Maybe they were there, but I don't know. You know, like, I don't remember.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

I just remember, you know, like, it was action. You know? Like as a kid it's like, it's action.

You know, like, some of it, you know, like, you don't understand it. And then you get to the point where, like, where there's a fight or something like that or, you know, like-- you know, like--

GARLIA Yeah.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME They're shooting it out, you know? And it becomes like a western, you know? Like any of the other movies that
BRADLEY- you were seeing at that time like James Bond.

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Mhm.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME You know, like, it's the same thing. You know, like, you look, and you see that there's some action that's
BRADLEY- happening.

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA You're like, oh, I want to watch that.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Love it. OK, as we close, a couple more things-- how has the cultural transformation process been for you? And I
CORNELIA think specifically with this-- specifically with this production, we have a process. And I know that that was a new
JONES: experience for you.

FREEDOME No, I was really-- I was really impressed with the work that [INAUDIBLE] did, you know, like when I came in, you
BRADLEY- know, like, to get us all talking, to get us all feeling comfortable. I mean, like, I've been through this process a few
BALLENTINE: times, you know, at a few different organizations over a few different years, you know? And I got something-- you
know, this experience that I had, it felt fresh, you know? Like, it felt really-- you know, I didn't feel like you were
being talked down to.

It felt like you were being included in a process to tell your story, to share your story, and to learn more about
somebody else's story, you know? And any process that's helping us to cultivate empathy, to cultivate
understanding, I think that's a great process to be going into and especially in a room that, you know-- that has
so many people of diverse backgrounds and talking about things that have happened to them and sharing
what's happened to me and understanding that, you know, some of our things are really different. But then some
of them are universal.

GARLIA Yeah.

CORNELIA

JONES:

**FREEDOME
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:** And I found that to just be, you know, really pleasant. And as we have these rooms, you know, part of when we talk about cultural transformation is making sure that the teams that we have working on these plays don't look like they did before-- you know, that we're not having all homogeneous teams, you know, and that we're making space for other people.

GARLIA Yeah.

CORNELIA

JONES:

**FREEDOME
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:** And other people learn differently. Other people express themselves differently. And we have to be conscious of that. And you know, there's also just different ways that we express ourselves from being, you know-- from someone being 50 and someone being, you know, 20. And we have to learn that too.

GARLIA Right.

CORNELIA

JONES:

**FREEDOME
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:** And if you don't learn that, then you wind up being regulated to the dustbin of, you know, history. So--

GARLIA That's a really dark, dirty place.

CORNELIA

JONES:

**FREEDOME
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:** Yeah, you know? But we have to-- you know, like, I look at these things, you know? I've stopped-- for years now, I've stopped talking about mentorships, you know? Like, I don't do-- I don't mentor people.

You know, I'll be in a relationship with someone, and there's some co-mentoring going on because what someone who's 18 or 20 has to teach me is just as valuable as what I have to teach them. You know, in mentorships, I think that they work really well when you're pointing out something that, hey, this is something that I've worked my way through, and this is a trap that I see, you know, like, coming up down the road, and you should watch out for that. That works both ways.

GARLIA Right.

CORNELIA

JONES:

**FREEDOME
BRADLEY-
BALLENTINE:** You know, like, how we use language, how younger people say, oh, you know, like, that's kind of cringeworthy how you said that, Pops.

GARLIA Yeah.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME You know, like--

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Right.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME --you want to make sure that, you know, that you're taking in as much from them and experiencing all that they
BRADLEY- have to offer you and that it can't just be one way. You know, I think that-- even when we talk about the
BALLENTINE: relationships that we're having with communities, it can't be one way. It has to be multifaceted.

GARLIA Mhm.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME There have to be different avenues of exchange for it to be valuable.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Right.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME You know, if I'm just giving you, giving you, giving you, giving you, and I'm not receiving anything, then I'm not
BRADLEY- getting any value from that.

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Yeah.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME And at any point, I can say, I'm tired of giving. You know, like, I can be out. But if I know that I'm getting
BRADLEY- something in return from you, then it makes it more difficult for me to walk away when the times are hard, when
BALLENTINE: the times are rough, because the relationship has value.

GARLIA Right.

CORNELIA

JONES:

FREEDOME So, you have to have these relationships with people.

BRADLEY-

BALLENTINE:

GARLIA Yeah.

CORNELIA

JONES:

WOMAN: Good morning, everybody.

MAN: Good morning.

WOMAN: Hi. Welcome to the first day of rehearsal for "The Harder They Come."

[CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

WOMAN: Five years ago, I went to see the first production of Suzan-Lori Parks' "Top Dog Underdog" right here in New York. And that night, I said, one day, we're going to be on stage with "The Harder They Come," and this woman is going to write it.

MAN: It came at a moment when rebellion across the globe was happening. And the film captured the spirit of that as it tells the story of one man's defiance against corruption and injustice. And so our work on the script has been to actually recognize the triumph and the accomplishment of the movie and transmute it for a modern audience.

There's so much darkness. We have to find the life force, the life force that allows us to want to move forward. And the way that we do that right now is to find it with each other.

That is our number one job in this film. OK, anybody coming in and out of here? You're part of that.

GARLIA We made it. You made it. Thank you for listening.

CORNELIA

JONES:

In case you hadn't realized, this podcast is new-- a relaunched redux with production support from Ghostlight Creative Productions, a company out of my hometown-- Detroit, Michigan. It's a big new project, part of my big new role as director innovation and new media at The Public, and it's exciting. But it can also feel like a lot of pressure because we are venturing into new territory, into the great unknown in many ways.

On our next episode, we celebrate Black History Month with conversations with "The Harder They Come" costume designer and current chair for the American Theater Wing board of trustees Emilio Sosa and professor and stage manager, author, and more, Narda E. Alcorn, whom you heard Freedom mention in regards to cultural transformation. As always, don't forget to like and subscribe, and we'll see you here Thursdays at "The Public Square."

MAN: Public Theater is--

WOMAN: The Public Theater is a space that can be filled by real people.

WOMAN: Where I can see bold and experimental theater.

MAN: To me, the Public Theater is--

MAN: It's like a neighborhood. You know, when you live in a neighborhood or on a block, you can go to each other's house and feel welcome when you walk in. You feel like you're at home. That's what the Public Theater is for me.

GARLIA Welcome home to "Public Square 2.0." We can't wait to have you back.

CORNELIA

JONES:

ANNOUNCER: Today's episode of "Public Square 2.0" was hosted by Garlia Cornelia Jones, director of innovation and new media at The Public Theater, with support from new media associate Emily White. Creative production includes story support by John Sloan III of Ghostlight Creative Productions and audio production by Justin K. Sloan of Ghostlight Creative Productions. Special thanks to Sharon Gordon, Sandra Daley Sharif, Kenny Seymour, Amrita Ramanan, Freedom Bradley-Ballentine, Justine Henzell, Kwame Dawes, Edgar [INAUDIBLE], Suzan-Lori Parks, Tony Taccone, Malika Lee Whitney, Camille Darby. For full list of credits, please visit our website, publictheater.org, for the shownotes.